2015: A YEAR IN ELECTIONS
OLD TRENDS AND NEW CHALLENGES
A fresh look by young Europeans
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The European Union has always struggled to build a strong relationship with its electorate and the results of the 2009 European elections showed that turnout is still declining and also significantly lower than in national elections. The percentage of young people that voted in these elections was even lower, with an average of 29% for the age group 18-24 and 36% for the age group 25-36. This worrisome trend was reconfirmed in 2014, when May 2014 EU elections saw the lowest voter turnout on record and an electoral turnout among 18-24 year-olds down to 28%.

FutureLab Europe’s bright minds authored the report “Missing a generation in EU politics – How to involve young Europeans?” which focused on the involvement of the younger generations in European elections and on EU affairs in general.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tania Marocchi

2015 had been hailed by many observers as the year during which voters would finally decide if the EU would survive. In recent years, several elements piled up suggesting the erosion of democracy in Europe: low turn-out in the elections (be it national or European), growing dissatisfaction of citizens against the establishment, low participation in civil society movements and recent constitutional changes in countries like Hungary. Several of these elements continued and in some cases further consolidated throughout 2015. As the year has now come to an end, it is useful to look back at what happened in order to understand how the situation evolved and what challenges lie ahead.

During the past year, general elections were held in Greece, Estonia, Finland, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Croatia and Spain. Mainstream parties were severely challenged on several occasions, especially in southern European countries: Spain and Greece were the most notable cases with the rise of the newly-founded, populist parties Podemos and Syriza.

More in general, the year 2015 did not halt the rise of populism, with both right and left wing populist parties gaining in strength in Finland, Spain, Greece and in France’s regional elections. Equally, in 2015 we witnessed a continued rise of Eurosceptic and straight anti-EU parties: in Poland over 40% of voters chose a Eurosceptic Party while France and, to a lesser extent, Finland witnessed similar developments, with the anti-EU National Front emerging ahead of both French major establishment parties overall in regional elections and the Finns' party strengthening its position.

National elections in 2015 also saw the continuation of worrisome trends among European youth already highlighted by the 2014 European elections: their lack of participation and their disillusionment with the EU. As much as 63% of Polish youth aged 18-29 voted for a Eurosceptic party in Poland, while Front National picked up 35 percent of votes from 18-34-year-olds in the first round of regional elections in France. Voting turnout among youth declined in the UK - where 18-24s are almost half as likely to vote as those aged 65 (43% vs 78% in 2015) - and France, where 65 per cent of young people of the same age group didn’t vote in the first round. Young people’s lack of participation has concerning long-term implications for the future of democratic engagement and the quality of European democracies.

FutureLab Europe, as a programme committed to empowering the voice of young Europeans and to the nurturing of active democracies and democratic participation, followed election processes and over the year, FutureLab Europe participants shared their opinions on elections in Europe on our blog. What you will find in this publication is a collection of those articles, a useful and fresh look back highlighting trends and commonalities and showing the challenges that lie ahead. Starting with Konstantina Karydi – who described vividly the atmosphere surrounding the January 2015 Greek parliamentary elections – this publication continues on a chronological reminiscence of the year 2015: tensions against Finnish Swedes during Finland’s
electoral campaign for April parliamentary elections were considered by Noora Löfström; in May, Mathew Shearman highlighted the lack of youth participation ahead of UK general elections while Ivan Stefanovski reflected on the reasons behind the loss of votes suffered by the UK labour Party; Marta Remacha commented on Spain’s May regional elections, highlighting elements later picked up by Germán Jiménez Montes who commented on Spain’s historical general elections of December 2015. Beyond EU borders, in June Efehan Danisman reflected on Turkey’s parliamentary election and the future of Turkey-EU relations, while Zuzana Novakova looked into the mood in which Ukraine held its regional election in October. October was an eventful month, with parliamentary elections being held in Portugal - commented on by Pedro Ponte e Sousa and Henrique Tereno – and Poland, which were explored by Hanna Piencykowska. •
HELLECTIONS?
A TALE OF POLITICS, FEAR AND HOPE

Konstantina Karydi

Greece held its legislative elections on Sunday, 25 January 2015. The election was held earlier than scheduled due to the failure of the Greek parliament to elect a new president on 29 December 2014. Left-wing party SYRIZA won a legislative election for the first time ever under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras, securing 149 out of the 300 seats, 2 seats short of an absolute majority. On the wake of the elections, FutureLabber Konstantina Karydi gave a grim account of the pre-electoral debate: the fear of a Grexit, uncertainty about the future, and the economic difficulties of Greek citizens.

Athens, January 23, 2015. Elections again. Already a phrase almost worth laughing about in some peoples’ minds. Citizens in their 30s, have already voted more times than some of our parents have in their lifetime, some will say. Yet, the laughing stops there. Elections, a very serious act indeed. And the beginning of this table-talk tale; on Greek citizens’ perceptions about Greece, politics and the EU. In Germany, and especially in the yellow press, circulate many stereotypes against Greek people. One goes like that: Greek live in order to eat – and not in order to work. This is why I present their thoughts as a table-talk tale.

Hors’ d’oeuvre. Did we want elections in the first place?

The stability argument stands somewhat in opposition to our democratic laws. Parliament must elect a president or a general election will have to be held. Prior to the final round of the presidential vote in Parliament the following was the central question on the news, on papers, online, on the street: Did Greeks really want elections? And what would these elections bring along? The process itself, the possible election of the highest office in our political system, the President of the Hellenic Republic, was, sadly, irrelevant. What everyone cared about was the prospect of elections, whether they supported them or not. And the clock was ticking: On December 29th, former EU commissioner Stavros Dimas, who was the only candidate, also failed in the third round to secure the votes required to be elected president.

Main-course: The pre-election period.

Who are you going to vote for and why? To this moment everyone seems to be convinced that Syriza, a party of the left, will be the winner of the general election. Even Angela Merkel and her government have allegedly been secretly negotiating with Syriza representatives; something which, officially, has been refuted. However, the determining factors on the ballot choice are not the specific positions of the competing parties on various policy fields (good luck trying to find them online) but the broader views on Syriza, its alleged role as governing party, its positions vis-a-vis the EU. It is not clear for example whether voters believe that specific promises will be fulfilled. Will, for example, the basic wage be returned
to the pre-crisis levels (751 euros/month from 511 euros pre-tax)? Hardly a determining factor. Anyway, it's too low; no one can live on 500 euros. Curiously enough, voters across the political spectrum actually agree on that point. On the other hand, what really seems to be affecting peoples' minds is stance vis-a-vis the EU. Syriza argues that in the context of the EU, a different solution can be negotiated, in respect of the Greek people's right for a decent life. In other words, Syriza argues that the EU is much more than one set of policies, superimposed to the European people by non-democratic forces (an argument often employed in the local news over the past years).

Interesting, isn't it? It is a national election, but what really occupies voters' minds are how parties position themselves towards the EU. Equally, the Greek election certainly concerns the European public opinion. Maybe European integration is far deeper than we thought.

**Dessert: The day after.**

This is the most interesting part. No-one on the street, seems to really know what the future holds. However, citizens, in their majority, appear to be motivated by the same decisive, often contradictory, arguments which will determine how they cast their vote. Let me give a few examples and thoughts:

- **The dread of an alleged Grexit, which no-one wants.** Some fear that we might be kicked out of the euro with grave consequences; the party of New Democracy in a new electoral spot directly encourages this fear. This affects part of the electorate's point of view; even if they recognise that we cannot go on like this, they are afraid that changing government might have far deeper consequences. On the other hand, the majority of voters seem to have overcome this argument, supporting that a different policy mix, more socially oriented, can and should be negotiated. A certain mood of "sentimental" fatalism might also be present: If we risk to change currency because we hope for the best, so be it, some might say; this is not the spirit of the EU that our nations have built.

- **The need for quality of life.** Everyone accepts that citizens are under serious strain, that the younger generation (up to their 40s that is) has been deprived of choices, of dreams and of the chance to innovate. The urge to improve is a top priority. But this is where the "stability determinant" kicks in: even if we are in dire straits, a possible change might be a step we need to improve and in order to improve we need a stable political environment.

- **Our relationship with the EU.** This is what the elections focus on. And arguably it is a "democracy" while there is a general agreement that the situation in the country cannot go on as it is, elements of acceptance and of defiance of the workings of the European Union are present in parallel. Acceptance, of the board of the game. The two competing parties, both adopt the message that the EU is where we belong, and that any solution to the problem will be at the EU level. So the question is whether these terms can change (terms, which, currently, are generally believed to be set by Germany). In other words whether Greece can affect a change of direction internally and in the EU.

- **The “internal change” determinant.** There is a consensus that we need more change, not only in the private and public sectors but also in the political sphere. People feel under-represented, while the traditional concepts of “right, centre and left” seem for many, a distinction of the past. This view, however, does not call for de-politicisation but for re-definition. Progressive vs
traditional are to some more appealing terms. The latter is also a determining factor for the elections. Greeks are ready to see coalition governments; yet, ironically, the electoral law, with the 3% threshold, seems to be suggesting otherwise. Were the system to be different, many would vote for smaller parties.

So: what motivates Greeks whom to vote? Their very own personal perception about change. Greeks are citizens of this Union. Just like the Germans, who very often know the Greek culture only from the restaurant in their neighbourhood. But many of my fellow citizens would not be able to afford a three-course-meal there. Instead, they depend on soup kitchens and food donors even in the posher areas of Athens. And that will also be decisive for the vote on Sunday. Because as all citizens, what the Greeks want is a decent living.

And with this in mind, they will cast their vote on Sunday. •

This blog post has been published in German on Süddeutsche Zeitung in the framework of FutureLab Europe and Süddeutsche Zeitung’s cooperation.
A SHIFT IN SCANDINAVIA’S OPEN SOCIETIES?

Noora Löfström

Finland held its 2015 parliamentary election on 19 April 2015. Prime Minister Alexander Stubb’s government was replaced by the winning Centre Party. The Eurosceptic Finns party lost one seat, but gained in strength, becoming the second largest party in the legislature. Before the elections, FutureLabber Noora Löfström expressed her concerns at the Finns party’s violent rhetoric against Finnish Swedes, also reflecting on her own experience of being a Swedish-speaking Finn.

Brussels, April 17, 2015. Around the world, Scandinavia is often portrayed as a role model: the welfare system, close to gender equality, no corruption, good quality of school systems and safe and secure environments. Openness and transparency shape the Nordic societies. You could think that being born in Northern Europe was like winning the lottery. In my world, this image was scarred by several events:

Finland, 2007: A gunman killed eight people and himself at a school in southern Finland, the second school shooting followed just a year later.

Norway, 2009: Right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in the terror attacks in Oslo and the nightmare on Utøya. I was about the same age as many of the young people at the camp and thus it really got to me.

Denmark, 2015: The most recent tragedy in Copenhagen in mid-February came equally as a shock as the others, although Denmark had had a high-risk profile for a while now.

The attacks in Denmark were committed by a young Muslim man, who was born in Denmark to Jordanian-Palestinian parents. The gunman was 22 years old. Radicalized and having become extremely religious, he was as old as Anders Breivik when it is said he started to plan the terrorist attack in Oslo and Utøya. In Norway, it was about a person from the country, not an immigrant who had become radicalized somewhere else and returned.

Had Breivik been a Muslim or had foreign roots, the discourse would most likely have been different. As he was Norwegian, the blame could not be put on another religion, immigration or the numbers of refugees admitted. However, both events represent a challenge to our open society. After Utøya, the Norwegians were praised for defending exactly those values, for responding with more freedom and democracy on the brutal terrorist attacks.

The opposite seems to be the case in the aftermath of the attacks in Denmark: Discussions take place around Europe on allowing the right to remove the passport and nationality of a person convicted of terrorism. Even if the situation and mood in Finland is not equally on the edge as in the neighbouring countries, the gloominess has a spill over effect. In Finland, the national parliament elections are coming up on the 19th of April. The rhetoric used by the Finns party is influenced by Copenhagen giving them new
ground to stand on and additional flesh on the bones of their racist arguments to those who listen.

It was in 2011, when the Finns celebrated their first success: the party, led by Timo Soini, grabbed 19 percent of the vote – forming the biggest opposition party to the six-party government. The right-wing populist Soini adheres to the standard set of xenophobic, nationalistic and anti-Islamic positions. But at that time, his success was mainly due to its party’s Eurosceptic discourse following a trend in other Nordic countries. In the following, Soini made headlines with his attempt to abolish compulsory Swedish tuition in public schools. The minority and immigration policies of his party have been criticized as going against the constitution. Soini defends his ideas saying that this would drive the national interest and – interestingly enough – defend the right of self-determination.

I am a bilingual Finn, having both Swedish and Finnish as my mother tongues. In Finland, 5% of the population speaks Swedish and it is the constitutional right of the Swedish minority to get state services in their mother tongue as Finland is officially bilingual. The discussion that the Finns party leads on abolishing the obligatory Swedish tuition in schools threatens the right of self-determination of the Swedish minority and goes against their core identity.

But you could quickly see that the campaign of the Finns party had shown some effects: there was a citizen’s initiative opposing mandatory Swedish-language classes in the Finnish school system and a debate on switching compulsory Swedish to Russian in the Eastern parts of Finland. This would threaten the situation and rights of the Swedish speakers, but the initiative was voted down in parliament 134-48 on the 6th of March. The anti-minority rhetoric of the Finns party also affected the discourse in parliament: the governing parties have taken a more cautious approach towards the Swedish language – and with the parliamentary votes 93-89, there will be an official study conducted on the regional options to studying Swedish in schools.

I was born in Stockholm, Sweden, but grew up in Tampere, a monolingual Finnish city where I attended the sole Swedish speaking school. I have learned from a very early age to be cautious with my second language: We stopped speaking Swedish in the city centre with my friends as teenagers when we realized we got odd looks, comments and remarks from strangers. Although Finland is officially bilingual, I do not attempt to speak Swedish in cafés or restaurants, as I simply find it less of a hassle. I have not encountered hostilities, but I have heard of people who have been denied service or even been beaten because they spoke Swedish.

Because of these tales and the recent success of the Finns party, I feel disappointed in my home country when negative voices are raised on Swedish language learning and the Swedish speaking minority. It would be nice to turn off the restriction of keeping to Finnish when running errands and be sure the status of Swedish will not be weakened. While many criticize and are hostile against the Swedish speakers, many more stand up for the minority rights. People do recognize the importance of a bilingual society and that every language is an added value. In Parliament, the Swedish People’s Party which has been in government since 1975 would not allow weakening the status of the Swedish language.

Nevertheless, the Finns with their loud rhetoric and grass root campaign seem to have hit a nerve with non-voters in the elections in 2011. As my experience show, the Finns have not invented the resentments against the Swedish minority, but their aggressive discourse has found their way into mainstream politics. And it does not seem impossible that they are in the next government. If this is the case, there will most likely not be space for the Swedish People’s Party although Soini has not excluded
forming a coalition with them. Ahead of the elections, the Finns play a hostile game also on other fronts: they want to cut the already low numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. They claim that we should not repeat the mistakes of our neighbours.

Soini’s strategy is clear: he tries to profit from the mood of anxiety after the Copenhagen attacks: Norway, Sweden and Denmark have tightened security measures as a reaction. Although in opinion polls Soini’s party rate lower than in 2011, he can already claim a victory: He has influenced the discourse and policies of the other parties towards minorities and the public debate.

However, the younger generation gives me hope. My impression is that they become more and more connected, increasingly international and even global. I hope that they realize that the solution does not lie in turning inwards and closing borders, but in being extrovert and embracing other cultures. We need to defend the values, the Nordic model is known for around the world: the welfare state and our open society. Because this is our success story.

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YOUNG BRITISH VOTERS: 
A CRUCIAL VOTE, IF THEY CAST IT

Mathew Shearman

On 7 May 2015, British citizens went to the polls to elect the 56th Parliament of the United Kingdom. The Conservative Party won 36.9% of the votes, winning 330 seats and having the chance to form the first Conservative majority government since 1992. The Labour Party, led by Ed Miliband, despite seeing a small increase in their vote share to 30.4%, suffered a net loss of seats, with only 232 MPs. In the wake of the elections, FutureLabber Mathew Shearman reflected on the role of young voters in determining the election results, arguing that young voters – which statistics show are less likely to participate in elections – have responsibility to participate, forcing parties to take account of their vote and contributing to a more representative government.

London, May 6, 2015. It is the closest election for a generation. Political parties are looking for votes in all parts of the electorate to secure the 326 MPs needed to form a majority Government in the House of Commons. The 3.3 million ‘first-time voters’ would provide a crucial base of support if they can be convinced to vote.

It seems that for many young British voters, the opportunity to shape the politically fragmented parliament is not essential. Only 51.8% of Britons aged 18-24 year olds voted in the 2010 election, an improvement on 2001 and 2005 (40.4% and 38.2% respectively) but still well below the national average (65.0% in 2010). Current forecasts suggest that 68% of young people were certain or at least ‘likely’ to vote, but this will surely ebb away on the day. This comes despite the new political dynamics brought by smaller parties: the Green Party, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Scottish National Party (SNP), who could act as kingmaker for the next Coalition Government.

Historically low turnout has relegated younger voters in the political calculations of all parties. In December, as many as 44% of young people had not decided who to vote for. Consequently, parties traditionally court elder voters, making less effort engaging younger ones. The centre-right Conservative party was accused of an “intergenerational theft” and of bribing elder voters when it used its last Budget to create a pensioner bonds for the over-65s at a substantial cost to the taxpayer. The offers for younger people have been less generous: continued funding apprenticeships would have to be paid with a cut to welfare support for young jobseekers.

In contrast, the centre-left Labour Party, has made steps on adopting positions on perceived ‘youth issues’ with a pledge to guaranteed apprenticeships for people, a younger voting age, and cuts to the costs of tuition fees. This strategy corresponds to the 2014 work by the Demos think tank suggesting that apprenticeships and reducing the cost of
higher education were top youth issue priorities.

Yet the concept of a so-called “youth strategy” is a misleading approach, as these issues do not dominate youth voting calculations. Among a recent poll, only 26% young voters viewed reducing university tuition fees as an important electoral issue. Instead, they aligned with the rest of the electorate in seeing ‘Managing the NHS’, ‘Keeping down the cost of everyday items’ and “controlling immigration’ as the most important reasons to vote for a party.

This would suggest that articulating broad political issues in a convincing and relevant way to their day-to-day lives may have a greater impact than tailoring campaigns in a narrowly “youth friendly” way to drive young people to the ballot box. NGO projects such as Bite the Ballot have already begun a non-partisan campaign to register young voters, demonstrating the importance of policy to young peoples’ lives and convincing them to vote. Compared with the over 65 category however, they still represent an unreliable source of support and as such, the generation as a whole undermines its own political influence.

One key area that they will have influence is in the political fate of the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in the Sheffield Hallam constituency. The area is a wealthy suburb, but also dominated by two universities, with voters drawn from both students and employees. In the 2010 election, the Liberal Democrats secured 48% of the national student vote, with its leader obtaining an overall majority of 15,284 votes in the area. However, the Liberal Democrats broke their campaign pledge on not raising tuition fees soon after entering government. This eroded Clegg’s personal credibility and recent polls suggest that the student vote could be reduced to 7% nationally, with Nick Clegg at risk of losing his parliamentary seat.

Electorally less important than assumed, the Europe question is an area of potential leverage for young voters. Looking ahead to a possible referendum on EU membership in 2017, young voters may hold the key to securing Britain’s continued membership of the Union. Polled in December 2014, 67% of first-time-voters suggested they would vote to stay in Europe, with UKIP’s Nigel Farage as their least favourite party leader.

The young electorate is statistically more likely to be liberal and broadly favourable to the European Union. If recent proposals of a younger voting age go ahead, which is rather unlikely, the impact of the younger generation on a referendum would increase. UKIP’s rejection of this proposal made by peddling the myth that children are “brainwashed” by “EU propaganda”, indicates their fear that young votes may push the balance in favour of remaining within the European Union.

Securing youth votes in the next election and any future referendum remains a challenge for the political system. Systemic electoral change and the introduction of voting online may help to lower the barriers. This, in conjunction with the development of more direct methods of campaigning, such as online videos and social media, could deepen the political significance of the youth vote in future elections.

If you believe British comedian and part-time revolutionary Russell Brand, young people should avoid voting in May. This is hardly the answer to political disaffection. A failure to turn up at the ballot in 2015 will give undue influence to both older people and that part of the electorate with traditionally more conservative views. Young people have a responsibility to participate in this election, forcing parties to take account of their vote, and in this way contributing to a more representative Government.
David Cameron has been returned as prime minister in the UK general elections – not with a landslide victory but with a seat gain sufficient for the Tories to form a single party government. A central electoral pledge of Cameron was his promise to hold an in-or-out referendum on the UK’s EU membership. It is now crystal-clear that the referendum will be held before the end of 2017 and many people are speculating about the possible outcome of such a referendum. FutureLabber Christopher Wratil tried to predict the referendum outcome analysing four factors that could move voters on the polling date: people’s preferences on EU membership, the referendum question and offer, the government’s popularity and inter- and intra-party politics.

Find out more: http://goo.gl/MK4nO
The May 7th elections in the United Kingdom marked a major loss for the Labour Party, as they received their lowest seat tally since 1987. Labour Party leader Ed Miliband resigned from his position and the party initiated a process to elect a new leader. FutureLabber Ivan Stefanovski explained why Labour failed and speculated on who could take on the role of party leader.

**Firenze, June 8, 2015.** Did it all start wrong with the inter-party election of Ed Miliband as President of the Labour in May 2010? Was that May 23rd an unlucky one for the Labour Party? After the electoral defeat in 2010, and the resignation of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown as leader of the Labour Party, many hoped that a new era for Labour was on the horizon. Although Miliband the older was a favourite in the inter-party election, younger brother Ed, standing on the shoulders of the trade unions, won the close tie by a small margin, achieving the support of 50.65% of the electoral college. In his early 40s, Ed was the youngest leader in Labour history, while also becoming a leader of the opposition in Parliament.

After five years of Tory ruling, and in the wake of the 7 March British elections, the average British citizen probably expected an offer that is fair, just and voter-friendly. Faced with the ruling of classical conservativism on the one hand and the so-called champagne socialism on the other, left-wing voters in Britain, probably expected a ‘full speed to the left’ approach. Miliband’s close ties to the trade unions promised a more working-class friendly line and the Labour Party seemed set to regain popularity among voters. Despite these elements, the Labour Party scored an even worse defeat at the recent 2015 UK General Elections. What happened?

**The Manifesto**

Labour’s Manifesto was an extensive summary of a modern leftist European party’s view on British society. Still, not taking into account the general austerity climate throughout Europe, the fiscal problems within the Eurozone and the economic policies of the biggest political parties in European countries, Labour failed to mobilise British voters using a clear and straightforward economic platform, which clearly differs from the current Tory offer. That is the reason why we reflect on these three points of the Manifesto: general economic policy, taxation and NHS.

When talking about the economic reforms, Labour pledged to “…reduce the deficit every year, to see debt falling as a share of GDP by the end of the Parliament, and to achieve a surplus as soon as possible. Labour…” and also promised to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour by October 2019. Although both proposals are valid and based on genuine needs of British society, they still have two general shortcomings: First, they are very
similar to the proposals mentioned in the 2010 Labour Manifesto – the one which removed Labour from power; second, some of the solutions, for example, eradicating the deficit by 2019 and raising the minimum wage by the end of this Parliament, can also be found in the Tory Manifesto. In other words, their general economic policies lacked an innovative cutting edge that would have made a clear difference between Labour and Tory solutions in the eyes of the electorate.

Taxation is one of the main arenas of every electoral battle. Labour promised to restore the 50p rate tax, to introduce the mansion tax and abolish the marriage tax allowance. The 50p tax rate means that all the earnings over 150,000 pounds will be taxed at a rate of 50%. Just before the elections however, Tory lowered the income tax to 45% for this category of citizens. They also planned to introduce a ‘mansion tax’, for homes worth more than £2 million, to restore the 10p tax rate and to abolish non-domiciled status. The restoration of the 10p tax rate meant that nearly 24 million people would have paid less taxes. Labour taxation policies were one of the most leftist measures proposed in the Manifesto. But still the Tory campaign managed to neutralise these measures by sending a warning signal to the middle class voters, telling them – “You will pay more taxes!” Because Labour failed to produce an efficient PR strategy, it was easy to twist its policies and draw the voters’ attention to issues where Tory had prepared a much better playing ground.

Speaking about NHS, Labour promised a £2,5 billion NHS Time to Care fund, paid for by the mansion tax and larger taxation of tobacco companies and hedge funds. This was planned to cover the salaries of 20,000 new nurses, 8000 new GPs, 5000 homecare workers and 3000 more midwives. Although these proposed measures promised a great improvement to the NHS, Tories made a move that checkmated the Labour propositions. Cameron promised £8 billion more for NHS, (a sum that Labour failed to match), seven-day NHS treatment and same-day GP appointments for people over 75. A real blast to Labour policies!

The Scottish Referendum and the SNP

Both Tories and Labour fiercely backed the ‘NO’ campaign for the Scottish independence referendum. Taking a look at the bigger picture and the general political context, it made perfect sense. Still, it seems that Labour forgot that elections are due in eight months' time and that Scotland is a Labour stronghold. On the other hand, supporting Scotland’s independence would have been costly for Labour. It seems that this was a lose-lose situation for Miliband’s party. Furthermore, it seems like Labour forgot that Britain is still voting using the first-past-the-post system, meaning that a loss of support can cost you many, many constituencies. So it happened. The Scottish National Party’s (SNP) landslide put Labour in a very weak second place, deteriorating Labour’s hope of a very tight loss. At the end of E-day, it was all Tory! Conservatives gained 24 more seats than 5 years ago (331), and Labour suffered by losing 26 seats more than in the previous elections, bringing the tally to 232 seats.

Looking forward – a new leadership as a preparation for 2020

After the unplanned heavy loss and the immediate resignation of Ed Miliband, Labour must now elect a new leader, and develop a strategy for tackling Tory policies in Parliament. Harriet Harman – acting Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition since 2015 -has once again been asked to take the caretaking role in the party. But this time, will her ambitions only be “acting” like 5 years ago, or will she launch a campaign to become party president? We must wait and see. Still, taking into account Hillary Clinton’s campaign for 2016, and her day-to-day growing popularity, maybe a Labour Party led by a woman will manage to persuade British voters that Labour
can offer a solution to the majority of British people's problems. It can be expected that Harriet will ride on “Hillary's Wave” of popularity in the US. If Hartman manages to win the inter-party elections, she can then wait for the epilogue of the US presidential elections and materialise depending on the final results. If Harriet Harman is a new solution, or just more of the “Champagne Left”, only time will tell.
Spanish citizens were called to the ballots twice in 2015: on 24 May to elect the regional parliaments of 13 of 17 autonomous communities, and on 20 December for national elections. Regional elections were particularly important as they were the first to see the participation of two new parties - Podemos and Ciudadanos – set to undermine the rule of the two traditional parties: the People's Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Podemos scored a strong third place, while Ciudadanos placed fourth in most regions. Ruling PP suffered one of the harshest loss of votes for any party in regional elections. Ahead of the election day, FutureLabber Marta Remacha analysed the role Podemos and Ciudadanos played on Spain's renewed political scene.

Madrid, May 22, 2015. Next Sunday, on 24 May, Spain will hold its municipal and regional elections to elect the members of all the city councils and of 13 of the 17 regional councils. Although local elections are normally seen as less important than national ones, we, Spanish citizens, are excited about this call to the ballot box. With general elections just around the corner – scheduled to be held next November – the upcoming local elections will be an important litmus test revealing the support behind each of the political forces.

Four years have gone by since the Spanish anti-austerity movement, known as 15-M, emerged to show people’s indignation at the current political and economic system ahead of the 2011 local and regional elections. 15-M claimed that the Partido Popular (PP) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), the two major traditional parties, were not representing the Spanish citizens and demanded a more participatory democracy. Despite the scope of the movement, it did not have a significant impact on the election results: PP, the party who had been governing Madrid for 16 years, got re-elected, and six months later, in the general elections, PP received enough votes to govern alone in absolute majority.

However, in the longer run, the 15-M movement has proved to have provoked a change of mentality among Spanish citizens. During the last four years, Spanish society has become more critical of bad management, more concerned about the decision making-process, and more sensible to corruption and noncompliance with electoral promises. Welfare cuts and traditional way of doing politics shown by politicians in power, along with the various cases of corruption uncovered during this period, have definitely eroded the image of the two major parties and the public’s trust in their representatives.

This mentality change, triggered by Podemos, eventually resulted in the fragmentation of the political scene. The results of the 2014 European elections in Spain came as a big surprise: “Podemos”, a newly founded and almost unknown left-wing party, obtained 8% of the votes and five seats in the EU Parliament. During the past year, Podemos has increased
its presence throughout the Spanish territory: recently, polls predicted that it will obtain up to 28% of the votes in the Madrid Town Council – which is the same as the PP is expected to get, and more than the PSOE. But it is not the only party to have recently flourished: polls predict that “Ciudadanos”, a centre-right party that went national only this year, might get close to receiving 16% of the votes in Madrid.

These elections will be very important to many Spanish citizens who feel that, for the first time in many years, their vote will be meaningful. Spanish electors are at a crossroads, since voting for traditional parties or for the new ones will convey two completely different messages about their demands and priorities. On the one hand, voting for traditional parties expresses a desire for political stability and easy decision making, and an appreciation for structured party bodies and representatives’ years of experience. However, it will also mean having to cope with corruption and nepotism. On the other hand, by supporting new parties, Spaniards are backing a new way of doing politics, which is more accountable and based on the principles of participatory democracy, and are clearly stating that they have zero tolerance for corruption. However, when voting for them, people might have to accept that some of their proposals might not be feasible, and that their weak – albeit growing – structures might hinder their ability to implement concrete changes.

With just two days to go, the outcome of Sunday’s elections is uncertain. According to the latest election polls, voting intentions remain unstable, while undecided voters represent between 30 and 45% of the total electorate. This makes last-minute campaigning all the more decisive, and parties are adapting their rhetoric to attract as many supporters as possible before voting stations open on Sunday. More specifically, traditional parties are mobilising the “useful” vote against new parties, saying that they will threaten democracy with their naivety and incompetence. In turn, new parties are mobilising the “protest” vote, channelling citizens’ rejection of the lack of credibility, integrity and answerability of the political forces in power.

Madrid’s political scene can be representative of the erosion of traditional parties, which is prevalent all over Europe. This erosion was already evident during the 2014 European elections, and hints have reappeared in the latest general elections of some European countries. Election results across Europe show bipartisanship is in the doldrums, but not collapsing. In fact, despite the general rise of radical and populist parties, Christian democrats and socialists continue to be the two major parties in Europe.

Yet, what all the different political scenarios across Europe demonstrate is many people’s uneasiness towards the old way of doing politics. New parties such as Podemos and Ciudadanos are finding their space in the political spectrum because they are engaging with voters using a language that’s closer to the public’s reality and expectations. The crisis that has been looming over Europe during the last years has created fertile grounds for similar parties and movements, as the inability of governing politicians to take effective measures has eroded the credibility of traditional parties even further. And even if new parties are branded as populists, as long as they gain the population’s support at the expense of conventional parties, they are reshaping the balance of power within European nations, and more importantly, giving power back to the citizens.

That is why I am optimistic about the next election results in Spain and their positive impact on the future of our country. Up to a certain point, the new party leaders have shown a different profile: they’re open to dialogue, willing to advocate people’s demands, using an up-to-date language, with honesty and charisma. All of this, which clearly
contrasts with the politicians’ ‘old way’, is making voters trust politics again. Besides, if new parties gather as many voters as the polls predict, they will break the traditional parties’ monopoly and remove the certainty that, regardless of their management, they would be in charge again in the next term. The upcoming elections will allow Spanish citizens to make their voices heard and show how years of bad management and negligence have a cost, to be paid at the ballot boxes.

FURTHER READING

SHOULD THE VOTING AGE BE LOWERED TO 16? SPAIN’S CASE
Carolina Seminario Herrera

In recent times, many countries in Europe have debated the possibility of lowering the legal voting age to 16. At the moment and within the framework of the EU, voting at 16 is only allowed in national elections in Austria since 2008, although it is allowed at different levels (local elections, referenda) in other countries like Estonia or Scotland. As a Spanish citizen living in Austria, FutureLabber Carolina Seminario Herrera reflected on both countries’ experiences and shared her perspective on lowering the voting age to 16.

Find out more: http://goo.gl/sdfzPu
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY:
WHERE IS THE EU?
Efehan Danisman

Turkey held its general elections on 7 June 2015 to elect 550 members to the Grand National Assembly. The result was the first hung parliament since the 1999 general election: the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its parliamentary majority and won 40.9% of the vote. Unsuccessful attempts to form a coalition government resulted in a snap general election being called for November 2015. FutureLabber Efehan Danisman looked into each party’s position towards the European Union, arguing that regardless of who will win the elections, the new Turkish government will need to cooperate with the EU to overcome several difficult challenges.

Istanbul, May 29, 2015. On 7 June 2015 Turkey will hold its 2015 general election to elect the 550 members of the Grand National Assembly. The results will inevitably have an impact on Turkey-EU relations. There are a number of formidable issues standing in the way of Turkey and the EU making any progress in their already bumpy partnership: accession negotiations have been stalled, mainly due to Cyprus’s blockage of most of the chapters and Turkey’s hesitance to open the remaining ones. Moreover, Turkey and the EU have common challenges other than accession negotiations, such as security – ISIS in particular -, refugees and energy fields. Despite these many common challenges, the attention devoted to Turkey-EU relations by Turkish political parties is relatively limited and in their electoral campaigns, parties rather focused on issues such as economic development, the long-standing Kurdish issue, large infrastructure projects and rule of law. In any case, the four major parties – the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Social democrat Republican People’s Party (CHP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) have very different positions with respect to the EU and their political manifestos ahead of the elections reflect these differences. After the elections a new engagement can be expected between Turkey and the EU due to the increasing need to cooperate, even though this will probably not translate into a honeymoon.

The ruling AKP is expected to win the elections but with less margin compared to previous elections. According to AKP’s election manifesto, EU membership is a strategic objective, but it should not be considered as an alternative to Turkey’s relations with other countries. The government party also targets the lifting of visas for Turkish citizens traveling to the EU, and wants an update of the Customs Union and enhanced financial cooperation along with a renewal of EU accession negotiations. Particularly lifting the visa requirements for other countries than the EU member states is an accomplishment the AKP prides itself on (visas for Turkish citizens traveling to China are expected to be lifted in 2016; while visa requirements for Ukraine and
Russia have already been lifted) and it is expected that they will be pursuing negotiations with the EU on this matter after the elections. The issue of upgrading the Customs Union has been pushed by Turkish policymakers for a long time and recently Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström asked for a negotiating mandate.

The Social Democrat Republican People’s Party (CHP) is currently the main opposition party and this will probably remain the same after the elections. CHP has the boldest position on EU accession and promises to finalize EU accession negotiations by making Turkey an EU member. Furthermore, CHP promises to not give one-sided concessions to the EU, protect Turkey’s interest in relation to the TTIP, explain how Turkey’s membership will make both sides more peaceful and advocate Turkish-Cypriots legitimate demands vis-à-vis the EU. Compared to other parties that are expected to be represented in the Grand National Assembly, the ruling AKP and main opposition party CHP seem to give more priority to EU membership than other contenders.

The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), a centre-right nationalist party and third force in the parliament, does not consider EU membership as a priority and looks at the EU as an institution not related to Turkey’s identity and destiny. Despite this, in case of a victory, it would support continuing accession negotiations unless they will touch upon issues considered fundamental to Turkey’s national unity and integrity. This particularly refers to relations with Armenia, Cyprus and Greece and the fight against terrorism.

The People’s Democratic Party (HDP) is expected to be the fourth party under the Turkish Grand National Assembly’s roof and is, to some extent, taking a leftist approach similar to that of Greece’s Syriza. HDP is walking on thin ice: it’s not sure whether it will be able to pass the 10% threshold. However, its potential presence in the parliament could significantly change the power balance in the Turkish parliament. HDP’s political manifesto touches upon Turkey–EU relations only briefly, simply saying “we will consider EU accession negotiations and full membership according to our principles”.

Elections are expected to result in the governing AKP’s victory. However, the number of parties in the parliament will determine whether or not the AKP can change the constitution alone or even whether the AKP can form an absolute majority government on its own. If HDP passes the 10% threshold, the AKP will probably be faced with two choices: either form a coalition government with one of the aforementioned parties, or rule as a minority government. The AKP needs 368 seats in order to change the constitution on its own, 331 to bring the proposed changes in the constitution to the referendum and 276 to form a single party government. If HDP will not be able to pass the threshold, the continuation of a single party government is the most likely result.

Regardless of who will win the elections, the new Turkish government will need to cooperate with the EU to overcome several tricky challenges. This needs an approach beyond the accession negotiations. Recently the European Commission asked a mandate to revise the Customs Union and on-going TTIP negotiations possible affects to the Turkey would be on the agenda. Moreover, visa-free travel negotiations are on-going and according to the European Stability Initiative (ESI), Turkey needs to make some serious efforts if it wants to fulfil the criteria and reach the visa-free travel goal.

Migration and security also pose a challenge to the partners; at the moment, Turkey is hosting around 2 million Syrian refugees and is in dire need of support from EU countries. At the same time, the EU is trying to deal with the ongoing disasters in the Mediterranean. Both
sides definitely need each other in that realm. They will also have to cooperate against ISIS and the threat of terrorism, particularly regarding foreign fighters originating from the EU member states. However, despite these common challenges, EU accession negotiations will not make any significant progress unless a deal is made on Cyprus.

Elections have a tendency to slow everything down, and Turkey and the EU relations are far away from its potential. In order to avoid another lost term, leaders on both sides should consider revitalising mutual relations.

FURTHER READING

RECENT EU-TURKEY AGENDA ON TURKEY-RELATED POLITICAL ISSUES
Sadik Tabar

German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit to Istanbul in October 2015 affected the electoral campaign ahead of Turkey’s November snap parliamentary elections. Fuelled by Merkel’s recognition of Turkey’s level of democracy in granting Turkey safe country of origin status as well as promising to speed up negotiations on EU accession talks, the Turkish ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) were more likely to gain credits to consolidate their pro-EU image in the eyes of undecided Turkish voters. Opposition parties, who based their competing campaigns on the claimed oppressive regime of the AKP, argued that Merkel – intentionally or otherwise – got involved supportively in the election campaign of the AKP.

Find out more: http://goo.gl/2aCXuB
ALL EYES ON UKRAINE?

SLOVAKIA’S TROUBLED NEIGHBOUR IN LIGHT OF REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Zuzana Novakova

On 25 October 2015, Ukraine held its local elections. Because of the ongoing conflict between the Ukrainian government and separatists and the February 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia, local elections were not conducted throughout all of the administrative subdivisions of Ukraine. In this pre-election analysis, FutureLabber Zuzana Novakova pointed out that, contrary to the traditional concerns over party competition and the overall fairness of the vote count, the elections were dominated by rather non-traditional concerns, such as whether, how and with what impact people will vote in the regions of Eastern Ukraine under the control of pro-Russian separatists. In fact, independent elections organised by the separatists would – in the eyes of Kyiv – be a move that would destroy the Minsk process.

Kyiv, October 17, 2015. Ukraine’s regional elections on 25 October come within complex conditions, hardly imaginable some two years ago at the outbreak of the “Euromaidan” protests in Ukraine. Next Sunday’s vote catches the country conflict-torn and its population struggling amid socio-economic difficulties. The controversies surrounding the elections are indicative of much wider structural debates over the country’s political future.

Since the Revolution of Dignity over a year and half ago, Ukraine’s political transition has been intertwined with the outbreak of separatist conflict in the East and by extension the constitutional reform to include decentralisation plan in this respect. The upcoming regional elections are likely to reflect many of the concerns and controversies bubbling beneath the surface.

The economic outlooks of an average Ukrainian citizen suffer in light of rising prices linked with inflation (reaching 52% at the end of last month) as well as the vulnerability of the Ukrainian hryvnia to depreciation. Even with this year’s slight increase in minimum wage¹, incomes are not increasing sufficiently to keep up with the higher prices. Ahead of a long winter, the phantom of rising energy prices imposes further constrains as households will be paying 450% more on energy bills. What’s more, the cuts in pensions and the insufficient financial support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) places an additional burden on the wallets of those helping their extended families. Meanwhile, austerity seems to be the only way forward for the state, which is in need of further loans. In this situation some pools indicate that more than half of polled Ukrainians are ready for street protests² if life gets worse, with 17% ready for a violent protest³. While potential protests are not likely

1 The minimum wage is currently at €55, a survival level rather than a living wage.

2 For more see Kyiv Post, 19 October 2015.

3 ICPS Kiev, diplomatic briefing of 3 October 2015
to gather a widespread uprising, their supporters are likely to pursue an increasingly radical line.

Alongside economic grievances, the ongoing conflict in the East has dominated debates in the run up to the elections: whether, how and with what impact people will vote in the regions of Eastern Ukraine, which is under the effective control of pro-Russian separatists in Donbas. Independent elections organised by the separatists would – in the eyes of Kyiv – be a move that would destroy the Minsk process.

Morel’s plan discussed in early October in Paris by the “Normandy Four” responds to some of these concerns. However, each proposed step seems to open more controversies than solutions. The major one is the sequence of the process following the Minsk agreement: elections first, then return of territory and ultimately control over the border. The initial proposal envisioned majoritarian elections, with election commissions formed by local residents (under the management of the Ukrainian Central Electoral Commission members), involvement of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and access for national media. Nevertheless, it remains problematic to imagine a free and open vote under the current physical insecurity in the occupied territories. Despite the ceasefire, a vote in the localities under armed control of rebel groups is rather unlikely to remain impartial, to say the least.

Another important aspect to highlight is the voting list in Donbas. The voting of IDPs is to happen in the region of their current residence. This might be an effective way forward in light of the insecurities in the East and perhaps also bearing in mind the need to integrate these internal migrants in the communities they currently reside in. Nevertheless, it also implies that they have lost any voice over the future development in their place of permanent residence. If only those who remained physically in Donbas can vote, the elections will for obvious reasons mark a clear win for separatists.

Contrary to the traditional concerns over party competition and the overall fairness of the vote count, these elections are dominated by the rather non-traditional concerns outlined above. At the same time, settling the technicalities of elections is only a small aspect among the many issues that could play into the future resolution of the wider structural problem. The conflict in the East has led to over 8000 casualties so far, including civilian lives. Poroshenko says the conflict is costing Ukraine $5 million a day. It affects everyday life as over a million IDPs have relocated within the Donbas region and to other parts of Ukraine, increasing the pressures on the state budget and on the housing market in major cities. Societal need for reconciliation has not been this high since the outbreak of the conflict. •
PORTUGAL:
HOW AN UNEXCITING ELECTION PRODUCED A SURPRISING POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE

Pedro Ponte e Sousa and Henrique Tereno

Portugal held its legislative election on 4 October 2015. Although the right-wing coalition Portugal Ahead (PâF), composed of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the People's Party (CDS-PP), won the single largest vote with 38.6% - losing 12% in support from previous elections – they secured only 46% of the seats in the Assembly, falling short of a majority. The Socialist Party (PS) was the second most voted political force, winning 32.3% of the vote and 37% of the seats in the Parliament but although the PS and the other left-wing parties did win a clear overall majority in Parliament, PS leader Costa initially refused a coalition with the Left Bloc and Communist Party. The Left Bloc (BE) achieved its best result in history with more than 10% of the vote, becoming the third largest parliamentary group. On 22 October, President Aníbal Cavaco Silva controversially designated PâF leader Pedro Passos Coelho to form a new government. The government fell after the approval of a motion to bring it down on 10 November. On 26 November, a new government was established as a Socialist Party minority government led by Prime Minister António Costa.

On October 4th, 2015, the Portuguese people went to the polls to vote at the Portuguese parliamentary elections. At the end of the day, according to the data given by the Ministry of Homeland Affairs, 56% of the Portuguese people voted and the right-wing parties, in a coalition entitled “Portugal à Frente” [Portugal Ahead] formed by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Social Democratic Centre - People’s Party (CDS-PP) led by Pedro Passos Coelho, the Portuguese Prime Minister since 2011, won the elections with 37% of the votes. However, they did not have the qualified majority required to govern. A political coalition with the strongest party, according to the data, was necessary. As a result, the right-wing tried to negotiate with the Socialist Party (PS) led by António Costa (32%). However, the Socialist Party joined forces with the left-wing: Left Bloc (BE) (10%), and the coalition formed by the Communist Party (PCP) and with Ecologist Party “The Greens” (8%). This new alliance formed by PS and the left-wing parties was something new for the Portuguese people. Usually, the party with more votes, even if it doesn’t hold a majority in the Parliament or is unable to form it with other political parties, forms a minority government and is commonly able to govern with the tacit approval of the main opposition party. Nevertheless, the coalition between PS and the left-wing allowed António Costa to become Prime Minister of Portugal and the right-wing government was unable to continue in cabinet.

In fact, this was seen by the right-wing as an antidemocratic act due to the fact that its coalition had, effectively, been the most voted in the election. However, it is important to bear in mind that Portugal has a parliamentary system and it is possible for a party to form a coalition with others in order to form a parliamentary majority. In addition to this, for the first time in the country’s democratic history the “arco da governação” – the unofficial
practical strategy which both excluded the extreme left parties of government and parliamentary majority solutions, and so pinpointed the other three parties (PS, PSD and CDS-PP) as the only ones having that responsibility – was overcome, with the Socialist Party in cabinet and the other leftist parties supporting its political stance in parliament.

On one hand, these results may show that the Portuguese are, in some way, exhausted with austerity measures: social inequality is soaring. Deterioration of living standards associated with high unemployment rates, high levels of emigration and cuts on the healthcare and education budgets are just a few examples of the serious effects of austerity measures. Nevertheless, it is important to state that the Portuguese economy is finally starting to grow, throughout the past year, and all macroeconomic figures are showing minor signs of recovery, and that the electoral results weren't any seismic change from previous elections. More than big fluctuations on who voted for which parties, it was mainly through a different strategy of leftist parties post-elections that this significant government and parliamentary change was produced.

On the other hand, some international impact - particularly in Spain - may be expected from this new political scene in Portugal. In Spain, the head of the Spanish Socialist Party, Pedro Sánchez has stated that he is willing to create a “coalition of progressive forces”, similar to what happened in Portugal, to lead the country if the winning People's Party (PP) is unable to form a government. Even though there are a number of differences in the two countries electoral results and main political parties, and the political scene is much more complex and unstable than in Portugal, the ability of the Portuguese Socialist Party to rally the left-wing parties against four more years of right-wing rule may inspire those “progressive forces” to come together.

In addition to this, the fact that party politics have become somewhat more unpredictable and new policies are dependent on a number of talks between the different parties is leading some people in both countries to be anxious, worried and uncomfortable. Both people which may see themselves as part of the right-wing or even the centre of the political spectrum claim that such a government is going to clash against EU policy guidelines and fully reject a number of austerity measures, while sharply increasing funds available for healthcare and education. Indeed, for most of the campaign, both former right-wing ministers and even the PM Passos Coelho highlighted the similarity between the Left Bloc and Syriza or Podemos, as well as the contradictions between the Communist Party intentions regarding EU, the Euro and foreign policy with the strategies supported by the Socialist Party. The right-wing argues that dismissing austerity measures will increase public debt to unsustainable levels, without any positive effect on the economy. However, the Socialist Party has emphasised multiple times that it is governing based on its own electoral program and not on the one from the Left Bloc or the Communist, and, even though negotiations are needed on a regular basis, it is expected that the Socialists may not accept a number of intentions from the left.

It is indeed a time of change. The Portuguese Socialist and Communist parties made an alliance for the first time since 1975 and they are walking side by side against austerity and right-wing policies. It is important to bear in mind that Syriza's movement in Greece “was the first radical-left government in Europe since the Second World War” (Eurozone Crosses Rubicon as Portugal’s anti-euro Left banned from power, The Telegraph) and yet it was crushed by the EU for confronting the Eurozone ideology. It is not expected that the Portuguese Socialist Party can become a new Syriza, but it is still a new progressive government which may join others in Europe for a cutback in austerity measures throughout the continent. To conclude, there are two
relevant issues to highlight: (1) there are Presidential elections at the end of January 2016 and, even though there are many candidates from the left of the political spectrum, that doesn’t seem to have caused any major fractures on the relationship between those parties, and it is unlikely to do so in the future; (2) the main challenge this left-wing agreement may face is the annual national budget approval, especially if new austerity measures are needed to comply with European rules. The agreement in place seems to have solved only the 2016 budget, while the remaining ones will require further and extensive talks between the parties in order to be accepted by the left. But, despite the possibility that the parliamentary majority may not last for the full 4 years, it will still be a better solution for most Portuguese, as the sort of “state of emergency” caused by austerity measures comes to an end. •
POLAND:
EUROSCEPTICS TAKE OVER
Hanna Pienczykowska

Parliamentary elections were held in Poland on 25 October 2015. Right-wing, Eurosceptic party Law and Justice (PiS) won the elections with 37.6% of the vote and 51 percent of the seats against the governing Civic Platform (PO). Leftist parties suffered a heavy defeat and were pushed out of the Parliament. FutureLabber Hanna Pienczykowska analysed the electoral outcome, expressing her concern for the absence of left-wing parties in the Parliament and over the fact that a majority of Polish youth voted for the Eurosceptic Law and Justice party.

Warsaw, November 4, 2015. The national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party’s victory in the recent Polish parliamentary elections was no surprise, and came in spite of the Christian Democrat Civic Platform (PO) government’s implementation of the EU financial programmes; continuous economic growth during its eight years in power; and successfully cultivating an image of Poland as an important partner in Central Europe. Moreover, just before the elections, the unemployment rate became a one-digit number. Despite these successes, Polish voters got angry with Civic Platform, especially when they raised the retirement age up to 67 for both men and women, then tried to close down the mines, which are not very profitable but employ many people and have a strong trade union representation. Polish voters also grew tired of personal scandals involving some ministers and top politicians of the Civic Platform and Polish People’s Party. They were furthermore confused by contradicting messages on the new refugee quotas coming from Brussels. Although accepted by the Polish government, the public’s concerns about the refugee crisis were echoed not only by nationals holding Celtic crosses at anti-refugee manifestations, but also by Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Law and Justice party, saying that refugees can “bring parasites to Europe”. Polish voters wanted a change.

Why did PiS win?

The Law and Justice party promised that change and won the parliamentary majority. First, they said they would re-install the previous retirement scheme, with women retiring at the age of 60 and men at 65. They also promised 500 zloty a month for every child after the first born, free medicines for seniors, lower taxes for individuals and small enterprises, and bigger taxes for big corporations and banks. The authors of these measures have calculated that only additional child benefits would cost over 21 billion zloty a year – but they have not yet disclosed how they will find that money – and economists predict that big corporations will just shift the increased tax burden to the customers. Moreover, the party always underlines that Poland cannot agree to every measure that is
imposed by the EU and tends to be xenophobic and revisionist, both on the international arena and back home. But why did 37.6% of voters chose to believe these populist claims?

As professor Bielik-Ronson said on Tomasz Lis na Żywo – a popular TV programme - on Monday, Polish voters do not let their vote depend on the economic programme of a particular party. She says that PiS owes its victory to its language of “pride and dignity”. That is also the reason why Kukiz ’15, a party lead by a rock singer whose main argument is that they have to topple the corrupt system, entered the Parliament.

Although many of PiS’ promises are just too expensive to implement, the party has won 235 out of the 460 seats in the parliament. This gives the party a mandate to create a single-party government. The last time this happened was in 1989. Because the Law and Justice party doesn’t need a coalition partner to form a government, it also doesn’t need to make any compromises. The party itself is under the control of one man: Jarosław Kaczyński. Although he’s not going to be the new Prime Minister, it’s him, and not the future PM, Beata Szydło, who looks at me from the covers of all opinion-making weeklies in the news shops.

**Why did PO lose?**

Civic Platform, which obtained 24% of the vote, will have 138 MPs. But the unpopular reforms of the past two years – raising the retirement age and attempting to close down some coal mines – may not be the main reason why PO lost so much power: paradoxically, it’s the European success of Donald Tusk, former Prime Minister and PO leader, that is to blame: Tusk used to block or relegate strong rivals in the party, but when he became President of the European Council, the Civic Platform was left without a strong leader. Ewa Kopacz, who succeeded Tusk as Prime Minister, was seen as an appointed substitute not only by the public opinion, but first and foremost by other members of her own party, who got disengaged from the campaign – and with Kopacz alone fighting for the reelection, it was impossible for the party to stay in power.

Moreover, Polish voters had the impression that the ruling party benefitted too much from its position. On the one hand, VAT was raised, while on the other Ewa Kopacz appeared in public wearing Michael Kors sneakers worth 600 zloty, one third of the minimum salary in Poland. For some voters there was an obvious link between those. Then the Minister of Foreign Affairs was recorded saying that the Polish-American alliance is basically worth nothing. In the 2015 presidential campaign, PO just assumed that Bronisław Komorowski, the country’s President from 2010 to 2015, would be re-elected with no effort. Then voters got disengaged from PO during the parliamentary election campaign, as much as the Civic Platform itself was disengaged during the presidential campaign. The party made plenty of mistakes, which created the impression that PO was more interested in the positions they held and were paid for than in being reliable representatives of their people.

**Why is there no left party?**

The biggest surprise of the elections was the result of the two leftist parties: the United Left (composed of Twój Ruch and the Democratic Left Alliance – 15% of seats in the previous parliament – and the Greens) and grass-root socialist party Partia Razem. Neither passed the election threshold, but what is interesting is that a lot of people with leftist outlooks say that it’s better that way: United Left was full of old, even Communist-era politicians who were blocking the generation change.

Not so with the second party, Partia Razem, which epitomises the generation change on
the left, but appeared only several months ago, without a charismatic leader, state subsidies, or exposure via prime time television, making it difficult to confirm their reliability and reach the broader public. Although they didn’t manage to reach the 5% election threshold, with a result of 3.6% they are entitled to subsidies from the public budget and can be better prepared for the next elections. On the other hand, it means that the Polish parliament will consist of centre-right, right-wing and far-right parties, like Kukiz ‘15 (9% of the votes in the elections), set up by a rock singer whose main goal – which earned him a lot of votes – is to topple the system.

I had a look at the MPs from this anti-establishment movement, including Rafal Winnicki, the leader of the National Movement and infamous nationalists’ marches on 11 November, and Adam Andruszkiewicz, the leader of the All-Polish Youth, which has organised several anti-migrant marches where the members of the organisation were praising the idea of “great Poland”; with such strong personalities on the right, the argument that the failure of the leftist parties will trigger reforms and result in a renewal of the Left in general in Poland seems to be somewhat weak. The question if there is somebody in the new Sejm able to outweigh the right-wing nationalist discourse is quite painful to answer.

Who votes for the right-wing parties?

While I’m writing this piece, Michal Bilewicz, a Polish researcher working on the prejudices of Polish citizens, is speaking on the radio. He says that there is a certain group of young people who believe in conspiracy theories and vote for anti-establishment parties. This trend has been visible for a couple of years, e.g. at the manifestations on Independence Day, attended not only by young activists of the National Radical Camp and All-Polish Youth, but also by my fellow students from the university. But I have never thought they were the majority. And I never would have expected that 63% of voters aged 18-29 would chose a right-wing, Eurosceptic party (Law and Justice, KORWIN, Kukiz ‘15).

There is also a certain change in the structure of the Law and Justice’s electorate. The party used to find most of its supporters among the victims of the liberal transition to the market economy, people who had no high education, and Catholics. But in these elections, PiS won in every age group and among people with a broad educational background. The only groups defined by Ipsos (an international market research company) in which Civic Platform won, were directors/managers and entrepreneurs and even here the differences were tiny. Furthermore, .Nowoczesna, a new neoliberal party representing entrepreneurs, which got 7.6% of votes and 28 seats in the Sejm, is expected to slowly but surely take over this electorate.

Analyses of any age or social group show the same thing: Polish voters turned right.

Why should we worry?

The outcome is worrying because without a leftist party in parliament, some segments of society will not be represented. The issues of gender equality, female leadership and generation change were addressed in this campaign, but the results were deceitful: even if female leaders Szydlo (PiS) and Kopacz (PO) were leading their parties’ campaigns, were they really making the decisions? And what kind of generation change and youth empowerment is this, if someone like Adam Andruszkiewicz (25 yo, Kukiz ‘15), who calls refugees “islamic terrorists” in public speeches and sends letters of support to Viktor Orban, becomes an MP, and Adam Kędziela (22 yo, .Nowoczesna), who has been working on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Poland and has lobbied
for better chances for young people on the labour market, loses by a whisker?

I thought I lived in a bubble of well-educated young people, living in big cities, and having the opportunity to travel. But when 63% of young people vote for a Eurosceptic party, maybe the bubble I live in is a completely different – and small – one. Having a lot of euro-enthusiastic friends like Futurelabbers or the people in the Model European Union community, I had the impression that people of my social and educational profile appreciated the idea of Europe, the importance of cooperation and the need to work on the flaws of the EU. In my view, it’s a civic education issue; let it be at school, in non-formal education or in private conversations. Now we are going to have Eurosceptics forming a majority government and promoting nationalism in the parliament with no leftist party to counter their discourse. I’m not afraid that democracy in Poland will collapse immediately, as some pro-Civic Platform media suggest, but the Hungarian scenario is slowly emerging on the horizon. Moreover, I have major doubts about whether objective school-based civic education, raising open-minded, critically thinking citizens, is possible in this political setting. It is something I blame the Civic Platform for; during the eight years they were ruling over my country they did not find it useful to introduce more intercultural teaching, European education and critical thinking in schools. Now we have to deal with the consequences. •
Spain closed the year by holding its general election on Sunday 20 December 2015. The election resulted in the most fragmented Spanish parliament in its history. The traditionally main parties – the ruling People’s Party (PP) and the oppositional Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) – obtained their worst results in the last 20 years, although PP emerged anyways as the largest party overall. Newcomer Podemos ranked third, winning over 5 million votes, some 20% of the share. The result marked an historical transition from a two-party system to a multi-party system. Ahead of the election day, FutureLabber Germán Jiménez Montes analysed the role of new parties like Podemos and Ciudadanos, rightfully predicting that 20 December elections would become a turning point for modern democracy in Spain.

**Madrid, December 15, 2015.** The constitutional monarchy, which was built after Franco’s death in 1975, was consolidated thanks to the alternation in governments led by the social democratic Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) or the conservative Partido Popular (PP). However, the sudden rise of two non-parliamentary parties, Podemos and Ciudadanos, is threatening this incontestable dominance of the two major Spanish parties. The breakdown of this political status quo will be one of the main consequences of the never-ending 2007 crisis; and the next parliamentary elections on 20 December will mark the beginning of a new era in Spanish democracy.

**A Second Transition?**

Although still leading in the polls, PP’s likely victory will not be enough for re-electing Mariano Rajoy as Prime Minister, and negotiations with PSOE or Ciudadanos will be needed. The positive macro-economic results of PP’s austerity policies have not had any effect on the population; recent Spanish economic growth has only brought increasing inequality, while the decrease of unemployment rates have masked the emergence of a dramatic situation: the growing precariat, temporary workers whose incomes do not allow to maintain themselves. A nationwide corruption scandal (*trama Gürtel*), which has directly affected PP’s national executive and Rajoy himself, hasn’t helped to improve the conservatives’ popularity either.

Meanwhile, PSOE’s prospects do not look any better. The social democrats started the 2011-2015 legislature from the bottom, after their worst election results in recent history. Nonetheless, the incapacity of their new candidate, Pedro Sanchez, to solve the internal crisis of PSOE will likely end up in another defeat on 20 December, according to the last surveys. Furthermore, the emergence of another large-scale corruption case
involving their biggest federation, PSOE Andalusia, has not made things easier.

Rajoy and Sánchez’ lack of popularity heavily contrasts with the leadership skills and freshness of Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos). The unexpected ascent of Ciudadanos and Podemos is intimately related to Rivera and Iglesias’ reputation with the public. Rather than political candidates, the young candidates have become the new stars of Spanish TV, which allowed them to conduct a very effective extra-parliamentary opposition strategy, participating in a wide variety of Spanish TV-programmes.

Rivera and Iglesias have shared the diagnosis of the Spanish crisis, giving two principal causes: bipartisan corruption, and the ineffectiveness of the Spanish economy and the rigidity of the labour market. Nevertheless, their proposals diverge greatly, from the liberal ideology of Rivera to the social democratic standpoints of Iglesias. The proximity of elections and their positive prospects, however, have pushed them to moderate their discourses in order to convince undecided voters. The last great success of Ciudadanos and Podemos was obtained in the past two presidential debates, in which they have managed to present themselves not as something completely new but as the renovation of the traditional Spanish bipartisan system.

But the elections aren't decided yet. The expected high participation and the considerable share of undecided voters make polls volatile. Only one thing seems to be certain: there will not be a clear winner and the four parties are condemned to negotiate. Although the resilience of PSOE and PP and the actual strength of Podemos and Ciudadanos are still to be tested, next 20 December is likely to become a turning point for modern democracy in Spain.
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ABOUT FUTURELAB EUROPE

Europe has to be a citizen project in order to succeed. It needs fresh ideas and innovative concepts as well as a strong supportive base from its younger generations. In order to enable FutureLab Europe to exist and develop, ten European Foundations, with the help of the Network of European Foundations and the European Policy Centre in Brussels, joined forces. They are assembling experiences, resources and – most of all – their outstanding Alumni. The programme currently has 85 participants coming from 28 countries – EU countries as well as non-EU countries.

FutureLab Europe is a project of the European Alliance for Democratic citizenship, affiliated to the Network of European Foundations and initiated by the Koerber Foundation. It is operated by the European Policy Centre in Brussels. The programme empowers young voices mainly on the topics of democracy and participation, equal opportunities on the labour market, and European identity. Participants of FutureLab Europe develop their own ideas and positions on matters of European relevance and take responsibility and actions in order to help build the Europe of the future. They share their young perspective on Europe through their blogs, in public debates and through their individual projects.

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