"What to expect in the 2009-14 European Parliament": Analysis from a leading EU expert

The success of smaller parties means that neither the centre-right nor centre-left will have the strength to dominate the new European Parliament. That is the central conclusion of a new study by London School of Economics Professor Simon Hix on the newly elected chamber. In a paper for the Swedish institute for European Policy Studies: "What to Expect in the 2009-14 European Parliament: Return of the Grand Coalition?" he analyses the election results and speculates on likely scenarios.

Professor Hix, who is a leading expert on European politics, is clear about the result of the June European elections: "The centre-right clearly won the June 2009 elections and the centre-left clearly lost". That said, he also points out that the arithmetic of the new parliament makes it likely that the larger groups will have to work together to build the necessary majorities to pass legislation.

3 largest groups lose ground

Professor Hix has shown that the proportional increase in the seat shares of the smaller political groups has come "at the expense of the three main groups", namely the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the centre-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the centrist Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE).

He notes that "compared to the composition of the outgoing 2004-2009 Parliament" proportionally the EPP have gone down "from 36.7% to 36.0%, the Socialists from 27.6% to 25.0%, and ALDE from 12.7% to 11.4%" of total seats.

He goes on to say that "of the smaller parties on the left, the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) went down, from 5.3% to 4.8%, while the Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA) went up, from 5.5% to 7.5%".

Turning right he points out that the forces to the right of the EPP have also increased. Using our calculations for this part, we estimate that in this Parliament the European Conservatives and Reformists with 7.5% of the proportional share on the one hand and Europe of Freedom and Democracy on 4.3%, are significantly stronger than the Union for a Europe of Nations (5.6%) and Independence and Democracy (2.8%) in the outgoing Parliament.

Explaining this he makes a general point about European Parliamentary elections pointing out that they "tend to be held in the middle of national election cycles, small opposition parties tend to do well in these elections".

Groups "more cohesive" than US Democrats and Republicans
Professor Hix was struck by a "highly cohesive way" political groups behaved in the last 2004-2009 Parliamentary term: "While voting in the chamber along party lines has increased, voting along national lines has decreased, so much so that in the 2004-09 Parliament, the main political groups were more cohesive than the Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress."

**Which nationalities are in which groups?**

On the key question of which countries' MEPs tend to be found in which political group, Professor Hix writes that in the EPP, "the (German) CDU/CSU will remain the largest delegation, but the Italian, French and Polish MEPs will be more influential in the new group than in the old group, while the Eurosceptic voices of the British and Czech MEPs will no-longer be heard at EPP meetings" as they have now left to set up another group. In the new S&D group the Italian delegation is the second largest after the Germans, followed by the French and Polish.

Turning to the left he says "the (German) SPD are once again the largest delegation, with the French, Spanish and British delegations weakened. And, ALDE will be dominated by the German and British MEPs, with secondary influence for the Italian, French and Benelux members."

**2009-2014: "alternative set of policies" needed**

In conclusion, Professor Hix offers some advice to MEPs. He believes that all parties in the Parliament should accept the June results and set out a clear "alternative set of policies" which "would allow voters to base their choices in the 2014 elections at least partially on the performance of those MEPs and parties who won the 2009 elections". 