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Germany on the European ballot: an  
announced shock and the risk of losing  
identity

by Andrea De Petris

Assistant Professor of Comparative Public Law  
University of International Studies of Rome - UNINT



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by **Andrea De Petris**

Assistant Professor of Comparative Public Law  
University of International Studies of Rome - UNINT<sup>†</sup>

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## 1. Political and institutional framework

As Art. 20 of the Basic Law (BL) states<sup>1</sup>, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) is a federal state with a highly rationalised parliamentary form of government<sup>2</sup>. The system gives political parties a central role in institutional dynamics, that is why Germany is also known as a party democracy. Elections to renew the Bundestag – the representative chamber of the German electorate – are held according to a personalised proportional system, which gives each voter two votes: a majority vote, with which they can elect a candidate in their constituency in a single round, and a list vote, with which they can express their preference for one of the competing parties, but without being able to choose between the candidates on their chosen list. Coalitions are usually necessary to form a government, as it is difficult for a single party to win a majority of seats in the Bundestag<sup>3</sup>.

The Head of State is the Federal President, who is elected by the Federal Assembly (*Bundesversammlung*), consisting of the elected Members of the Bundestag and an equal number of representatives of the *Länder*, and receives a five-year term of office, renewable once. Legislative power is vested in an imperfect bicameral system, in which the two chambers have partially differentiated powers. Legislative power is conferred in particular on the Bundestag, which is elected every four years by ‘universal, direct, free, equal and secret suffrage’ (Art. 38 BL) by all German citizens. On the proposal of the Federal President, the Bundestag gives its vote of confidence without debate only to the Federal Chancellor, who, as head of

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<sup>\*</sup> The text is an anticipation of the final - updated and revised - version that will be included in the volume “*The European Parliament elections of 2024*”, published by Giappichelli, Turin.

<sup>1</sup> Art. 20 (1) BL: “The Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic and social federal state.”

<sup>2</sup> K. VON BEYME, A. BUSCH, *Das politische System der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Wiesbaden, Springer, 13. Ed., 2023.

<sup>3</sup> For an accurate analysis of the form of government in the FRG s. F. PALERMO, J. WOELK, *Germania*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2. Ed., 2022.

the Government, determines the guidelines for the internal and foreign policy of the Executive at federal level (the so-called *Richtlinienkompetenz*) (Art. 65 BL) and proposes the ministers of his Cabinet, appointed by the Head of State (Art. 64 BL). In order to stabilise the position of the Government and the Chancellor in particular, the BL provides for a highly rationalised form of the trust relationship between the Executive and the Legislative, centred on the institution of ‘constructive no-confidence’ (Art. 67 I BL). This provides that the Bundestag may only express no-confidence against the Federal Chancellor alone, and not against the government as a whole, provided that, by a majority of its members, a successor is elected at the same time as the resolution sanctioning the removal of the incumbent Head of Government, with the requirement that at least 48 hours elapse between the tabling of the motion of no-confidence and its vote in the Bundestag. In this way, the position of the Executive, and in particular of the Federal Chancellor, is strongly strengthened, since the failure to obtain a majority of votes in favour of an alternative candidate to the Head of Government at risk of no-confidence may not only indirectly strengthen the latter, but may also result in an early dissolution of the Bundestag itself by the Federal President. Political forces are therefore called upon to consider very carefully the opportunity to use the institute of constructive no-confidence<sup>4</sup>.

The institutions of the federal government and the division of powers and responsibilities between the Federation and the Länder are governed by the Basic Law, the constitutional charter of the Federal Republic of Germany, which has been in force since 1949. The Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) ensures compliance with the Basic Law and, among other things, the conformity of federal and state legislation with the provisions of the Basic Law. The Länder are represented at federal level by the Bundesrat, which participates in the legislative process together with the Bundestag when measures affect the interests of the Länder.

## 2. Parliamentary seats and electoral system

Germany’s 96 seats in the European Parliament are allocated by means of a proportional electoral system, which allows parties to decide whether they want to stand with lists at state or federal level. The lists are closed, so it is not possible to express preferences within them: consequently, unlike the electoral system for the Bundestag, each voter has only one vote<sup>5</sup>. Since 2009, the distribution of seats has also been calculated using the divisor method with standard rounding (Sainte-Laguë). Not only German citizens, but also citizens of other EU Member States residing in Germany may vote if they apply to be included

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<sup>4</sup> S. DEIBNER, *Die Vertrauensfragen in der Geschichte der BRD*, VDM Verlag, Saarbrücken 2009. For a reconstruction in Italian of the events surrounding the two cases of constructive no-confidence votes recorded in the 70-year history of the FRG s. S. FILIPPONE THAULERO, *La «sfiducia costruttiva» nella Legge Fondamentale tedesca*, in *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 4/1990, pp. 590-604.

<sup>5</sup> [How to vote in Germany](https://elections.europa.eu/en/how-to-vote-in-germany), elections.europa.eu.

in the German electoral roll for European elections. It is also possible to stand as a candidate for the European Parliament from the age of 18 (passive voting age), although the voting age has been lowered from 18 to 16 by an amendment to the electoral law which came into force in 2022<sup>6</sup>.

In Germany, a long debate has been going on for years about the possibility of introducing a threshold for European elections, as is usually the case for parliamentary elections. Since 1979, the year of the first direct elections to the European Parliament, there has been a 5% threshold for the European vote in Germany: in 2011, however, the Federal Constitutional Court abolished this threshold, declaring it unconstitutional. In the run-up to the 2014 European elections, a 3% threshold was therefore initially adopted in Germany, but following an appeal by a thousand German citizens and 19 smaller political parties, this provision was also annulled by the Federal Constitutional Court<sup>7</sup>. As a result, the 2014 European elections were held without a threshold. In their 2014 ruling, the German constitutional judges stated that the barrier clause violated the principles of equal opportunities for political parties and equal voting rights. The BVerfG also ruled that the situation in the European Parliament is different from that in the German Bundestag, “where the formation of a stable majority is necessary for the election of a government capable of acting and for its continued support”. The ruling does not preclude a change in jurisprudence if, in the future, there is evidence of a significant change in the relevance of the European Parliament for the formation of an executive body of the EU.

In July 2018, following approval by the European Parliament, the European Council agreed to introduce a barrier clause for all EU member states that allocate more than 35 seats in a constituency<sup>8</sup>. However, such changes to electoral laws must be ratified by all Member States before they can be implemented: in Germany, this requires a two-thirds majority of the members of the Bundestag and Bundesrat, which was not achieved. In February 2019, the CDU/CSU and Greens parliamentary groups declared that the European provision on the barrier clause would not be implemented by the Bundestag for the time being: as a result, the 2019 European elections in Germany will also be held without a minimum threshold for converting list votes into seats.

The current German government had already expressed its support for the introduction of a blocking clause for the European elections in the coalition agreement concluded after the 2021 elections, which stated that “if a new European regulation on elections to the European Parliament is not adopted by the

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<sup>6</sup> V. *infra*, in this section.

<sup>7</sup> BVerfG, [2 BvC 4/10](#) of 9.11.2011. On this decision s. M. MORLOK, *Chancengleichheit ernstgenommen – Die Entscheidung des Bundesverfassungsgerichts zur Fünf-Prozent-Klausel bei der Europawahl*, in *JuristenZeitung* 2/2012, pp. 76-80. For a comment on the decision in Italian s. G. DELLEDONNE, [Il Bundesverfassungsgericht, il Parlamento Europeo e la soglia di sbarramento del 5%: un \(altro\) ritorno del Sonderweg?](#), in *Rivista AIC*, 1/2012 of 14/3/2012.

<sup>8</sup> [Council Decision \(EU, Euratom\) 2018/994 of 13.7.2018](#) amending the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Council Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom of 20 September 1976.

summer of 2022, Germany will implement the regulation for the 2018 European elections on the basis of a government draft<sup>9</sup>. As the previous Council Decision on the 2018 elections also included the possibility of introducing a *Sperrklausel*, there would be two ways in Germany to achieve a European blocking clause for the future: either the European Parliament and the Member States agree on a new proposal containing a blocking clause, or the Federal Government proceeds with the implementation of the previous 2018 Decision. In June 2023, the Bundestag therefore voted by the required two-thirds majority to introduce a minimum 2% threshold for European elections, which will apply from 2029.

With regard to the way in which seats in the European Parliament are distributed, as mentioned above, the Sainte-Laguë/Schepers method is used in Germany. This is a variant of the d'Hondt method which avoids penalising smaller parties. The 96 seats are allocated to the parties in proportion to their total number of votes. If necessary, the seats allocated to a party which contested only some of the Länder with individual lists of candidates are divided between those lists. The seats thus determined for a federal or Land list are allocated to the candidates on the list according to their ranking on the list. If all the candidates on a list have been allocated a seat and there are still seats to be allocated to that list, they remain unallocated. In the Sainte-Laguë/Schepers method, the votes of each party are divided by a common divisor (divisor method with standard rounding)<sup>10</sup>. For European elections, this means that an approximate allocation is first calculated by dividing the total number of votes to be taken into account by the total number of seats to be allocated, thus determining a provisional allocation divisor. The resulting quotients are rounded up or down to give the number of seats: if the remainder is more or less than 0.5, it is rounded up or down; if the remainder is exactly 0.5, it is decided by drawing lots. The divisor shall be such that the total number of seats corresponds to the total number of mandates to be allocated. It should also be noted that the minimum voting age in Germany has been lowered from 18 to 16 for the European elections only. On 10 November 2022, the Bundestag adopted a bill<sup>11</sup> proposed by the parliamentary majority to amend the relevant electoral law in this sense, with the CDU/CSU and AfD voting against<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, [Wahlalter bei Europawahl auf 16 Jahre abgesenkt](#).

<sup>10</sup> The formula is: number of party votes ÷ allocation divisor = number of party seats (after standard rounding). To determine the allocation divisor, the formula is: total number of votes ÷ total number of seats to be allocated = provisional allocation divisor. In order to ensure that the number of seats corresponds to the number of seats to be allocated, the allocation divisor shall be increased or decreased as necessary until the calculation gives the total number of seats to be allocated, using a standard rounding method: the number of seats shall be rounded up if there is a fraction of more than 0.5, down if there is a fraction of less than 0.5 and shall be decided by drawing lots if there is a fraction of exactly 0.5.

<sup>11</sup> Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 20/3499, [Gesetzentwurf der Fraktionen SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP](#), 20.9.2022.

<sup>12</sup> For a comment on the issue of lowering the voting age for European elections s. M. VON ROCHOW, [BVergG for Future: zum Wahlalter bei Europawahlen](#), in *Verfassungsblog.de*, 17.5.2019.

### 3. The 2019 European elections

In Germany, the 2019 European elections brought about significant changes in the political scenarios compared to the previous situation<sup>13</sup>. The first fact that caught the attention of politicians and analysts was the performance of the two largest parties: both the CDU/CSU and the SPD recorded a significant drop in support, albeit to different degrees. While the CDU/CSU lost 7.5 per cent of its support compared to the 2014 European elections, the Social Democrats suffered a veritable collapse, losing 11.4 percentage points compared to five years earlier and garnering only 15.8 per cent of the vote - the SPD's worst result in the history of the FRG up to that point.

The second striking aspect was the performance of the Greens: the environmental movement doubled its share of the vote compared to five years earlier, establishing itself as the most important newcomer to the German political landscape at the time and, above all, becoming the second national party after the SPD for the first time in its history. The third data point worth noting concerns the performance of the xenophobic-populist far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which, although only increasing by 3.9% compared to 2014, showed that it had stabilised the size of its support among the German electorate.

Looking at the individual performances in more detail, these are the most relevant data from the 2019 European elections in Germany: within the Union, the 7.5 per cent drop compared to the previous elections was mainly due to the CDU, while the Bavarian CSU increased its result from five years earlier by one percentage point. As a result, the Union lost five seats compared to the previous European legislature. The party of then Chancellor Angela Merkel lost support mainly in the eastern states, especially Brandenburg and Saxony. The SPD, which stopped at 15.8 per cent of the consensus, recorded a loss of 11.8 per cent of the vote compared to 2014, and consequently 11 fewer seats in the European Parliament. A decline that, in addition to that of the 2017 political vote, confirmed an apparent structural consensus crisis of German social democracy. It should be noted that the party that once belonged to Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt suffered its greatest losses in regions such as North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein, as well as in the city of Hamburg: all former strongholds of the Social Democratic Party. The Greens were the undisputed winners of the European contest, not only because they almost doubled both their votes (+9.8%) and their seats (from 11 to 21), but also and above all because, for the first time in the history of the FRG, the environmental party established itself as a leading political force in a large part of Germany, including the eastern regions, which had previously been considered less sensitive to the progressive demands of the environmental movement. The right-wing

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<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the 2019 German vote please refer to A. DE PETRIS, *Le elezioni per il Parlamento Europeo 2019 in Germania: Transizione, Crisi o Catarsi?*, in B. CARAVITA (a cura di), *Le elezioni del Parlamento europeo del 2019*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2019, pp. 307-344.

populists of the AfD did not make a big splash, but nevertheless gained 3.9 per cent more preferences than in 2015, mainly in the eastern states, where it emerged as the leading party in Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. This confirmed the AfD as the main reference party of the electorate most dissatisfied with the government's actions, although it was noted that precisely for this reason the consensus achieved could be unstable, as it belongs to a protest vote that is usually quite volatile. As for the other political forces, the Free Democrats (FDP) improved their result by 2.1 per cent compared to 2014 and gained two more seats in the European Parliament, while the left-wing party Die Linke lost almost 2 per cent of the votes and two parliamentary mandates. The consensus for the so-called “small” parties also made headlines, helped by the abolition of the threshold, which made it easier for voters to direct their preferences towards movements that would otherwise have received little support. Thus, the conservative FREIE WÄHLER party (two seats), which was already in government with the CSU in Bavaria at the time, the Pirates (one seat), who had been able to achieve some success at regional or local level in the past, the Family Party, the Animal Protection Party, the ÖDP ecologists, the new liberal VOLT formation, all of whom will have a seat in the next European Parliament, and also the “satirical” party DIE PARTEI, which was able to win two seats, won seats in Brussels. Finally, the turnout of 61.4 per cent of those eligible to vote was remarkable.

#### 4. Electoral campaign and competing political parties

The European election campaign in Germany took place in a heavy political climate adversely affected by negative socio-economic conditions<sup>14</sup>. Despite the fact that this is an election based on a highly proportional system, the parties in Germany are trying to personalise their campaign by presenting national *Spitzenkandidaten* (leading candidates). It should also be noted that, within the Union, the CDU is only running in 15 of the 16 Länder, while the CSU is only running in Bavaria, resulting in the presentation of a “leading candidate” for each of the two movements. These are the names of the candidates and the peculiarities for each of the main parties in the race.

CDU - Ursula von der Leyen

Although the outgoing President of the European Commission has been nominated by the CDU as the *Spitzenkandidatin* for the European People's Party (EPP)<sup>15</sup>, she is not on any electoral list and is therefore not directly eligible for the new European Parliament. Von der Leyen has a long history in politics, serving as Minister for Family Affairs, then for Labour and Social Affairs, and from 2013 to 2019 as Defence Minister in various governments led by Angela Merkel. During her presidency, the European

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<sup>14</sup> B. KARGE, [European elections in a chaotic Germany](https://eurac.edu/2024/02/13/european-elections-in-a-chaotic-germany/), eurac.edu, 13.2.2024.

<sup>15</sup> F. BACCINI, [Von der Leyen Spitzenkandidatin del Ppe alle elezioni europee: “Non permetteremo agli estremisti di distruggere l'Europa”](https://eunews.it/2024/03/07/von-der-leyen-spitzenkandidatin-del-ppe-alle-elezioni-europee-non-permetteremo-agli-estremisti-di-distruocere-l-europa/), eunews.it, 7.3.2024.



Commission has implemented major projects such as the Green Deal and the EU Migration Pact, which have also provoked protests and public dissent in Germany and Europe. If re-elected, she has said she would strengthen EU defence policy by creating a new defence commissioner within the Commission<sup>16</sup>.

CSU - Manfred Weber

With a long experience in Strasbourg and Brussels, Manfred Weber has been a member of the European Parliament since 2004, as well as group leader and chairman of the European People's Party (EPP). In 2019, Weber was the EPP's top candidate, but despite his group's victory, the position was ultimately awarded to Ursula von der Leyen. Weber describes the upcoming vote for the European Parliament as a "fateful election"<sup>17</sup>, focusing mainly on migration policy and advocating the usefulness of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. He also wants to reduce the EU's ban on combustion engines from 2035.

SPD - Katarina Barley

Already the SPD's top candidate for 2019, Barley was reappointed to the role with almost 99% of the Social Democrat delegates' votes<sup>18</sup>. Outgoing Vice-President of the European Parliament, Barley's campaign focuses on "threats to democracy" and the "fight against the right". He is in favour of increasing (financial) pressure on Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and, if necessary, withdrawing Hungary's voting rights in the European Council if Orbán continues to block important EU decisions, such as increasing financial aid to Ukraine.

FDP - Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann

With the slogan "Fighting for Europe", Strack-Zimmermann aims to halt the decline of the FDP at the European level. A member of the Bundestag since 2017, in the Bundestag she has vehemently advocated increased support for Ukraine<sup>19</sup>. Her campaign for the European elections focuses on defence - on which she is an expert - and foreign policy, in which she proposes an EU army with joint armament projects to make them more economically efficient. Another central point of her campaign is the need for a clear demarcation against extreme right-wing parties, which are considered dangerous to the foundations of the EU, as well as a commitment to reduce bureaucracy and increase freedom of action for businesses.

Greens - Terry Reintke

A graduate in political science, Reintke is *Spitzenkandidatin* not only for German Greens, but also for the European Greens together with Dutchman Bas Eickhout. Co-chair of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament since 2022, she became the youngest MEP in 2014, at the age of 27. She has been especially committed to key issues for environmental movements, such as climate protection and social

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<sup>16</sup> A. ROUSSE, J. POSANER, J. CIENSKI, [Von der Leyen plans new defense commissioner post](#), politico.eu, 17.2.2024.

<sup>17</sup> [Söder und Weber einig: Europawahl ist Schicksalswahl für den Kontinent](#), diepresse.com, 25.11.2023.

<sup>18</sup> N. ALIPOUR, [EU elections: Germany's SPD reappoints Barley as its top candidate](#), euractiv.com, 25.9.2023.

<sup>19</sup> M. GWYN JONES, A. ROGAL, [Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann wird Spitzenkandidatin der Liberalen bei den Europawahlen](#), euronews.com, 11.3.2024.



justice. Highly critical of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, Reintke also laments the dangers of the growing influence of the right wing and supports minority rights<sup>20</sup>.

AfD - Maximilian Krah

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* describes him as an AfD “hardliner”<sup>21</sup>. Accused of historical revisionism and racism, Krah has been a lawyer and MEP since 2019. He recently hit the headlines because one of his employees, who has since been fired, is suspected of spying for China<sup>22</sup>. The public prosecutor’s office in Dresden is also conducting a preliminary investigation into Krah himself, following reports of alleged money flows from pro-Russian and Chinese sources. In interviews, Krah has been known to make disparaging remarks about the EU, most recently sparking outrage when he told the Italian daily *Repubblica*: “I would never say that everyone who wears an SS uniform is automatically a criminal”<sup>23</sup>, prompting other AfD members of the Identity and Democracy group in the European Parliament to call for his expulsion from the group<sup>24</sup>. Krah, who has since announced his two resignations from the federal leadership of his party, was banned by the AfD from taking part in any further European election campaign events<sup>25</sup>: an event that has never happened to a top candidate in the history of European elections.

Die Linke - Martin Schirdewan and Carola Rackete

Martin Schirdewan, co-leader of the left-wing movement Die Linke, has spent the last few months trying to stabilise the party in crisis following the departure of popular and controversial MEP Sahra Wagenknecht and other party members<sup>26</sup>. Schirdewan, who has been an MEP since 2017 and is already Die Linke’s top candidate for 2019, criticises the possible alliance of the European People’s Party with the Conservatives and Reformists group in the next legislature<sup>27</sup>. The political novelty for the party is the candidacy - as an independent - of Carola Rackete, who became internationally known in 2019 when she docked in Lampedusa with refugees rescued at sea on the ship *Sea Watch 3*, despite a ban by the Italian authorities. Rackete is committed to supporting migrants and fighting the climate crisis<sup>28</sup>.

Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht - Fabio De Masi and Thomas Geisel

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<sup>20</sup> D. ROBBACH, [Grünen-Kandidatin Terry Reintke: Die Optimistin](#), fr.de, 22.5.2024.

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the AfD situation in the German pre-election political context s. E. TONOLATTI, [La Germania e le elezioni europee del 2024. Il caso AfD: prospettive e sviluppi](#), in *Center for European Studies Working Papers* 2/2024.

<sup>22</sup> E. WAX, P. EMMANUEL NGENDAKUMANA, H. VON DER BURCHARD, [Germany arrests EU Parliament aide over bombshell China spying claims](#), politico.eu, 23.4.2024.

<sup>23</sup> T. MASTROBUONI, [La versione di Krah: “Non prendo soldi dai russi. Le SS criminali? Sbagliato generalizzare”](#), repubblica.it, 18.5.2024.

<sup>24</sup> P. VON PEZOLD, E. WAX, N. VINCOUR, [Far-right ID group expels Alternative for Germany](#), politico.eu, 23.5.2024.

<sup>25</sup> [Krah zieht sich zurück - Auftrittsverbot verhängt](#), tagesschau.de, 22.5.2024.

<sup>26</sup> S. DONATSCH, [Martin Schirdewan \(Linke\): Der Erfabrene](#), Frankfurter Rundschau, 22.5.2024.

<sup>27</sup> R. BUCHSTEINER, T. LEHMANN, [»Es gibt keine Mitte zwischen Antifaschismus und Faschismus«](#), spiegel.de, 21.5.2024.

<sup>28</sup> H. MÖHLE, [Aktivistin Rackete setzt auf den Druck der Straße](#), rp-online.de, 23.5.2024.

Fabio De Masi won a seat as an MEP in the 2014 elections, where he investigated financial and tax scandals, and then used these skills as an MEP in Berlin from 2017 to 2021 for Die Linke. De Masi was part of the internal Linke current led by Sahra Wagenknecht, a well-known but eccentric member of the party leadership. In 2022, he left the Linke to join the newly founded movement Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW), founded in early 2024 by Sahra Wagenknecht in dissent from the party's political line<sup>29</sup>. In his campaign, De Masi proposes minimum taxation for large companies and less EU bureaucracy. Thomas Geisel, former mayor of Düsseldorf from 2014 to 2020 and one of the founding members of the BSW, advocates a “common sense European policy”<sup>30</sup>, which he interprets as the need to involve the EU in problems that member states would not be able to solve on their own. Geisel sees the EU primarily as an economic community and, in the long term, sees rapprochement with Russia as a positive aspect.

Freie Wähler - Christine Singer

Christine Singer is the *Freie Wähler's* (FW - Free Voters) *Spitzenkandidatin* in Bavaria, runs a dairy farm with her family and wants to bring her practical knowledge to European politics. The *Freie Wähler* have ruled out any possibility of cooperation with political forces on either the extreme right or the extreme left. In the European Parliament, they belong to the Renew Europe group, where they will be represented by two MEPs from 2019 to 2024: Engin Eroglu and Ulrike Müller. In its election manifesto, the party calls for Europe to develop a common border protection strategy, to monitor the entire external border of the EU, and believes that asylum procedures for migrants should take place “mainly at the external borders of the EU within a few days”. The FW also calls for a streamlining of the bureaucracy involved in agricultural policy<sup>31</sup>.

Other parties with a chance of electing at least one of their members to the next European Parliament include *Die Partei* (Party for Work, the Rule of Law, Animal Welfare, the Promotion of Elites and the

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<sup>29</sup> Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht - Vernunft und Gerechtigkeit (BSW) is a political party founded in January 2024 around the leadership of MP and journalist Sahra Wagenknecht. Most of the founding members previously belonged to the Linke. The party is currently represented in the Bundestag and in three regional parliaments thanks to a change of group undertaken by a number of MPs elected on Linke lists. The BSW is still difficult to classify politically: with respect to socio-economic issues, it appears close to typical left-wing demands, whereas it is more conservative on socio-political issues. In its election programme for the European elections, the BSW expresses strongly critical positions towards the institutions of the European Union, s. [Wagenknechts neue Partei gegründet – Europawahl als erstes Ziel](#), [spiegel.de](#), 8.1.2024. On the impact of the new political formation on the German party system s. L. C. WURTHMANN, J. P. THOMECEK, [Bridging Left and Right? How Sahra Wagenknecht Could Change the German Party Landscape](#), in *Politisches Vierteljahresschrift*, 2023, pp. 621-636.

<sup>30</sup> [Wechsel ins Wagenknecht-Lager: SPD-Politiker Geisel rechnet mit Genossen ab](#), [stern.de](#), 4.1.2024.

<sup>31</sup> [Europawahl: Das wollen die Freien Wähler](#), [br.de](#), 14.5.2024.

Grassroots Democratic Initiative), the Ecologist Democratic Party (ÖDP), the *Familienpartei*, the Liberals of Volt and the *Piratenpartei*<sup>32</sup>.

Table 1 shows the possible distribution of the European vote in Germany according to an opinion poll conducted on 17 May 2024 by the demographic institute *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen*<sup>33</sup>.

Table 1: European election poll 17.5.2024/Difference 2019 (%)								
	CDU/CSU	Grüne	SPD	AfD	Linke	FDP	BSW	Altri
Election Poll 17.5.2024	31,0	15,0	14,0	15,0	3,0	4,0	5,0	13,0
European Elections 2019	28,9	20,5	15,8	11	5,5	5,4	-	13
Difference	+2,1	-5,5	-1,8	+4	-2,5	-1,4	-	-

Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen

If the result of the survey is confirmed, the German electorate would not be particularly upset in comparison with 2019: the preferences for the Union and the AfD would increase, while the parties that make up the current Bundestag majority would fall by between 1.8 and 2.5%, and the Linke would record a substantial halving of its result, probably to the advantage of the new left-wing formation *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht*. The size of the preferences for the other political forces would remain unchanged, which would confirm the 13% achieved in 2019, possibly favoured by the absence of any barrier clause.

## 5. Electoral results

The result of the European vote in Germany<sup>34</sup> - summarised in Table 2 - determined a real upheaval of the political scene compared to the pre-existing situation, especially when referring to the picture that had emerged from the vote for the renewal of the Bundestag in 2021. The most relevant salient data concern the performance of the three parties that make up the current ‘traffic light’ federal coalition (*Red* Social Democrats, *Greens* and *Yellow* Liberals), all of which have been strongly downsized, and the successes of CDU and CSU, together the first political force in the country, and the radical far-right movement AfD. The latter, for the first time in its history (since 2009, therefore), asserts itself as the second most voted party in a nationwide election.

In order to fully understand the outcomes of the vote for each party, the results of the individual list are presented below compared not only to the previous European elections in 2019, but also to the general elections in 2021. Despite the fact that these consultations are conducted with different electoral rules<sup>35</sup>,

<sup>32</sup> For a comprehensive summary of the German parties' election programmes for the 2024 European elections s. [Wahlprogramme zur Europawahl 2024. Zusammenfassungen](#), Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg.

<sup>33</sup> [Europawahl 2024: Wahlprognosen – Umfragen](#), Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg.

<sup>34</sup> All official electoral results of the European elections in Germany are available at Bundeswahlleiter.de, [Europawahl 2024](#).

<sup>35</sup> S. below for further explanations.

which play a relevant role on the expression of voters' preferences, the basis of the two electoral laws remains in fact proportional. This allows better than in other countries - which adopt different electoral systems for political and European elections - to understand more accurately the changes in voters' orientations and the extent of the results achieved by the different parties. Besides, in order to gain an even better understanding of the distribution of preferences in the country, as well as the possible political consequences of the results, the performance of parties in both the West and East of the FRG will be taken into account, since it happens often to be extremely different in the two contexts.

<b>Table 2: EU elections 2024 - Comparison with EU elections 2019 and general elections 2021</b>								
	<b>EU 2024</b>		<b>EU 2019</b>		<b>Diff. % 19-24</b>	<b>BTag 2021</b>		<b>Diff. % 21-24</b>
	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>Quantity</b>	<b>%</b>	
Eligible voters	61,941,751	-	61,600,263	-	-	61,172,771	-	-
Voters	40,128,348	64.8	37,807,746	61.4	+3.4	46,707,343	76.4	-11.6
Void votes	332,136	0.8	410,857	1.1	-0.3	408,956	0.9	-0.1
Valid votes	39,796,212	99.2	37,396,889	98.9	+0.3	46,298,387	99.1	-0.1
CDU	9,431,567	23.7	8,438,975	22.6	+1.1	8,774,920	19.0	+4.7
CSU	2,513,300	6.3	2,355,067	6.3	±0.0	2,402,827	5.2	+1.1
<i>CDU+CSU</i>	<i>11,944,867</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>10,774,042</i>	<i>28.9</i>	<i>+1.1</i>	<i>11,177,747</i>	<i>24.2</i>	<i>+5.8</i>
GRÜNE	4,736,913	11.9	7,677,071	20.5	-8.6	6,814,408	14.7	-2.8
SPD	5,548,528	13.9	5,916,882	15.8	-1.9	11,901,558	25.7	-11.8
AfD	6,324,008	15.9	4,104,453	11.0	+4.9	4,809,233	10.4	+5.5
DIE LINKE	1,091,268	2.7	2,056,049	5.5	-2.8	2,255,864	4.9	-2.2
FDP	2,060,457	5.2	2,028,594	5.4	-0.2	5,291,013	11.4	-6.2
Die PARTEI	775,392	1.9	899,079	2.4	-0.5	460,431	1.0	+0.9
Freie Wähler	1,062,132	2.7	806,703	2.2	+0.5	1,125,667	2.4	-0.3
Tierschutzpartei	570,498	1.4	542,226	1.4	±0.0	673,669	1.5	-0.1
ÖDP	257,968	0.6	369,869	1.0	-0.3	112,129	0.2	-0.4
Familie	243,975	0.6	273,828	0.7	-0.1	-	-	-
Volt	1,023,161	2.6	249,098	0.7	+1.9	164,300	0.4	+2.2
Piraten	186,773	0.5	243,302	0.7	-0.2	169,587	0.4	+0.1
MERA25	118,616	0.3	130,229	0.3	-0.1	-	-	-
Heimat	41,006	0.1	101,011	0.3	-0.2	64,360	0.1	±0.0
TIERSCHUTZ hier!	173,443	0.4	99,780	0.3	+0.2	-	-	-
Verjüngungsforschung	18,935	0.0	70,869	0.2	-0.1	48,496	0.1	-0.1
BIG	31,141	0.1	68,647	0.2	-0.1	-	-	-
Bündnis C	75,053	0.2	66,327	0.2	±0.0	39,868	0.1	+0.2
PdH	82,275	0.2	62,604	0.2	±0.0	-	-	-
Menschliche Welt	54,098	0.1	34,470	0.1	±0.0	-	-	-
DKP	14,945	0.0	20,396	0.1	±0.0	14,957	0.0	±0.0
MLPD	13,553	0.0	18,342	0.0	±0.0	17,820	0.0	±0.0
SGP	5,923	0.0	5,283	0.0	±0.0	1,399	0.0	±0.0
ABG	26,506	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
dieBasis	99,502	0.3	-	-	-	630,153	1.4	-1.1
Bündnis Deutschland	164,477	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
BSW	2,453,652	6.2	-	-	-	-	-	-

DAVA	148,724	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Klimaliste	31,504	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Letzte Generation	104,340	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
PDV	29,508	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
PdF	227,631	0.6	-	-	-	3,228	0.0	+0.6
V-Partei <sup>3</sup>	55,440	0.1	-	-	-	31,763	0.1	-
Others	-	-	757,735	2.0	-2.0	490,737	1	-
Others II*	8,090,171	-	4,819,798			4,048,564		

Source: Bundeswahlleiter

\* Parties with seats in the Bundestag excluded

The first figure to highlight concerns the turnout, which was 64.8%. It not only shows a further increase compared to the 2019 European elections (+3.4 percentage points), but is also clearly above the European average, which stands at 51.01% in 2024<sup>36</sup>. This shows that the German electorate seems to have taken the consultation much more seriously than in several other EU Member States, and that the result itself holds considerable significance, absent elsewhere<sup>37</sup>.

The leading party in the consultation is the Union, given by the combined votes of the two parties CDU and CSU<sup>38</sup>, which with 30.0% is definitely the winning force in the consultation. Compared to the Bundestag elections of 2021, CDU/CSU gains 5.9 percentage points, while with respect to the European elections of 2019 the increase in support is smaller (+1.1 percentage points) but still present. Together, the Union parties send 29 MEPs to the European Parliament: 23 belonging to CDU and 6 to CSU. The number of seats obtained remains unchanged for both parties compared to the 2019 European elections. The success of the Union is undoubtedly much more in the West, where it obtains 32.4 per cent of the votes, than in the East, where it stops at 20.7 per cent of the preferences. The growth in support compared to the 2021 general election is also greater in West Germany than in the East. In particular, the Union achieved the best results in Bavaria (39.7%, thanks to the performance of CSU), Baden-Württemberg (32.0%), Lower Saxony (31.4%) and North Rhine-Westphalia (31.2%). In eastern Germany, the results in Thuringia (23.2%), Saxony-Anhalt (22.8%), Saxony (21.8%) and Mecklenburg-Western Pommern (21.5%) were overall even.

The other major exploit in the German European elections comes from AfD, which stands at 15.9 per cent of the vote, and grows considerably compared to both the 2021 federal elections (plus 5.6 percentage points) and the 2019 European elections (+4.9 per cent). The result allows the radical, anti-European far-

<sup>36</sup> European Union, [Turnout by Year](#), 12.6.2024.

<sup>37</sup> 2024 European election results, [Turnout by country \(%\)](#), 14.6.2024.

<sup>38</sup> On the peculiarities of the alliance between the CDU and CSU, which is mainly based on the fact that they form a single parliamentary group in the Bundestag and have entered into a kind of 'pact of desistance' whereby the CDU runs as a candidate in all of Germany except Bavaria, while the CSU only runs with its own representatives in Bavaria and refrains from doing the same in the rest of Germany s. H.-P. SCHWARZ (Hsg.), *Die Fraktion als Machtfaktor: CDU/CSU im Deutschen Bundestag 1949 bis heute*, Pantheon Verlag, München 2009

right party to gain 15 seats in the European Parliament, 4 more than in 2019. As was to be expected in view of its political history<sup>39</sup>, AfD is significantly more successful in East Germany (26.6%) than in West Germany (13.1%), and its growth in support compared to the 2021 general election is also greater in Eastern Germany than in the West. While it comes after CDU/CSU in all western Länder, as well as behind SPD and the Greens in several regions, AfD achieves its best results in East Germany, with the sole exception of Berlin: the party is the most voted in Saxony (31.8%), Thuringia (30.7%) and Saxony-Anhalt (30.5%).

SPD obtained 13.9% of the vote, which is the worst result ever for the Social Democratic Party in a nationwide election. In comparison to the 2021 federal elections, its share of support almost halved (-11.8%), while compared to the 2019 European elections there was a much smaller loss (-1.9%). SPD elects 14 MEPs, 2 fewer than in 2019. As for the Union parties, SPD obtains the highest support in the West (15.0%), while it does much less well in the East (9.9%): moreover, although it suffers losses of support in both areas of the country, the Social Democracy suffers a slightly higher drop in Eastern Germany than in Western Germany. The SPD's best results were achieved in Bremen (21.5%) and the Saarland (20.5%), while the biggest losses compared to the 2021 federal elections are in the east, in Mecklenburg-Western Pommern (-18.8 points) and Saxony-Anhalt (-16.7 points).

The Greens stand at 11.9 per cent, marking a loss of 2.9 percentage points compared to the 2021 federal elections, and as much as 8.6 fewer than in the 2019 European elections: this downsizing clearly corresponds to a drop in the delegation of MEPs, from 21 to 12. In West Germany, the environmental party gets the lion's share of the votes (12.9 per cent), while in the East it is much smaller (7.9 per cent). Taking the vote for the Bundestag in 2021 as a point of reference, it emerges that the German environmentalists suffered losses of similar magnitude in both areas of the FRG, while in the 2019 European elections the Greens had significantly better results in both the East and the West. Compared to 2019, however, the Greens lost significantly more in West (-9.3 points) than in East Germany (-5.9 points), with the best results in Hamburg (21.2 per cent) and Berlin (19.6 per cent).

Six months after its foundation, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) participated in its first national elections and obtained 6.2%, which is worth 6 seats in the next European Parliament. As was to be expected, BSW achieved the best result in East Germany, where it gained 13.1% of the vote, compared to West Germany, where it stopped at 4.4%. On a regional level, Wagenknecht's movement performs best in Mecklenburg-Western Pommern (16.4%), Saxony-Anhalt (15.0%) and Thuringia (15.0%): in general, apart from Berlin, in the eastern Länder BSW is the third most voted party after AfD and CDU. In West Germany, the party gains the most votes in the Saarland (7.9%).

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<sup>39</sup> D. BEGRICH, [\*AfD: Die neue Macht im Osten\*](#), Blätter, 7/2019, 9-12.



FDP stands at 5.2 per cent of the vote, losing more than half of its support compared to the general elections of 2021 (-6.3 percentage points), while it remains practically stable compared to the European elections five years ago (-0.2 per cent). The quota of seats in Brussels also remains unchanged at five. The Liberals proved to be more popular in the West, where they gained 5.8% of the vote, than in the East, where they gained only 2.9% of the preferences. The FDP's best performance is in Hamburg (7.0%) and Baden-Württemberg (6.8%).

The left-wing party Die Linke stopped at just 2.7% of the vote, penalised by the simultaneous candidacy of Sahra Wagenknecht's movement, which probably gained support among the leftist electorate. This explains above all why the Linke lost 2.2 % of the vote in the Bundestag elections in 2021 and 2.8 % in the European elections in 2019. The share of seats in the European Parliament stands at 3, with representation almost halved compared to 2019 (-2). Even for the Linke, as its electorate is mainly located in the East, it is understandable how the data of the last consultations shows that the party was rewarded much more in East (5.4%) than in West Germany (2.1%). On the other hand, the concomitant strength of AfD and BSW in the eastern Länder means that the Linke lost far more support in the East than in the West than in the general election of 2021, whereas in the last European elections the best results were in Berlin (7.3%), Bremen (5.8%) and Thuringia (5.7%).

The *Freie Wähler* (FW) gained 2.7% of the vote and thus 3 seats (+1 compared to 2019), making a slight increase (+0.5%) compared to the previous European elections. The pro-European Liberals of Volt obtain an astonishing 2.6% of the votes, +1.9% compared to 2019, and 3 seats (+2). Also gaining seats in Brussels are the satirical party Die PARTEI (1.9%, 2 seats), the Party for the Protection of Animals (*Tierschutzpartei*, 1.4% and 1 seat), the Ecological-Democratic Party (*Ökologisch-Demokratische Partei* - ÖDP), the Family Party (*Familienpartei*) and the Progress Party (*Partei des Fortschritts*), each with 0.6% and 1 MEP elected to the European Parliament. The other running parties (22), which did not receive seats, gained a total of 3.7% of the votes.

When comparing the results of the 2024 European elections with previous consultations, in any case, certain aspects related to the way the vote was cast should be considered. The electoral systems used in the parliamentary and European elections in Germany show significant differences: above all, it should be pointed out that in the elections for the Bundestag there is the well-known 5% threshold of valid votes in order to be able to transform the share of preferences obtained into seats, whereas the vote for the European Parliament in Germany does not have any kind of barrier. The presence of a *Sperrklausel* has notoriously a great impact on the practice of the so-called “useful vote”, generally prompting voters to direct their vote towards parties that have the best chance of overcoming the barrier, to the detriment of lists that are less likely to achieve this result. This explains why in the general election in Germany the



“dispersed” vote, i.e. the vote for parties without seats in the federal parliament, remains substantially low: as Table 2 also shows, in 2021 these preferences amounted to just over 4 million. In the European vote in 2024, on the other hand, the votes going to parties other than those currently represented in the Bundestag doubled compared to the political vote in 2021, to more than 8 million. In addition, as mentioned above, in the European elections in Germany the vote was also extended to voters aged 16 and 17 for the first time: a measure not foreseen for the parliamentary elections, which will therefore have an electorate with a partially different composition when voting for the Bundestag again, probably in 2025.

It follows that, notwithstanding the undeniably heavy drop in support for the parties currently in government in the European vote, it is likely that the next political vote will in any case present an at least partially different configuration: the presence of the barrier clause should induce at least some of the voters of movements that have remained below the 5% consensus threshold to converge their vote on different parties<sup>40</sup>. The lower dispersion of preferences could also partly favour the parties of the current “traffic light coalition”, since at least some of the minor parties voted in the European elections present progressive or environmentalist orientations, although there is no lack of conservative or right-wing anti-system movements.

Besides, the absence of minor voters, who on this occasion seem to have mainly rewarded AfD and smaller parties<sup>41</sup>, means that their votes will at least in part not be in the ballot box in the next political elections. Overall, therefore, these differences could to some extent affect the balance of power between the parties in the Bundestag elections: something to be taken into account in any case.

## 6. Polical comments and future scenarios

It has been rightly observed that in many Member States European elections have acquired a function of “mid-term elections”<sup>42</sup>: that is, consultations whose objective is not to compare proposals and positions with respect to the policies to be adopted at European level, but rather to ascertain the voters’ approval of the parties in government at national level, and Germany is no exception. On the one hand, this has positive implications, as it generally increases the interest of citizens in the European vote. As far as the German electorate is concerned, in fact, statistical data show that in 2024 62% of the surveyed sample

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<sup>40</sup> On the effects of the barrier clause on the European vote in Germany s. S. ROßNER, *Verfassungswidrigkeit der Fünf-Prozent-Sperrklausel im Europawahlrecht*, in NVwZ 2012, 22-25.

<sup>41</sup> Voters aged between 16 and 24 voted mainly for CDU/CSU (18%), AfD (17%) and minor parties (28%). How many of these are underage voters has not been estimated for the time being, s. [Wie junge Menschen bei der Europawahl 2024 gewählt haben und warum](https://www.mrd.de/2024/06/10/wie-junge-menschen-bei-der-europawahl-2024-gewaehlt-haben-und-warum/), mrd.de, 10.6.2024.

<sup>42</sup> V. NEU, J. ROOSE, [Europawahl in Deutschland am 9. Juni 2024, Monitor Wahl- und Sozialforschung](#), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Berlin, June 2024.

showed a “strong” or “very strong” interest in the run-up to the elections: they were 63% in 2019, but just 41% in 2014<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, the same polls show that the European election choices in 2024 were made on the basis of the domestic political situation for 49% of the sample, compared to 38% who stated the same in 2019. In any case, on the whole, the analyses indicate the prevalence of pro-European positions in the German electorate, with 70% of the respondents believing that EU membership is a good thing<sup>44</sup>, and 87% that they would still like to remain part of the EU<sup>45</sup>.

Noteworthy, on the other hand, is the change in political priorities for the German electorate compared to 2019. In order of relevance, the issues with respect to which voters show the greatest concern in 2024 are: rise in crime (74%, 22 percentage points higher than in 2019), the fear that climate change will affect their existence (66%, -11), fear that the influence of Islam in Germany will become excessive (61%, +14), fear that expressing opinions on certain topics will lead to social exclusion (58%, unchanged), fear that the lifestyle in Germany will change too much (56%, +15), fear that too many foreigners will come to Germany (53%, +19), and fear that they will not be able to keep their lifestyle unchanged (50%, +20)<sup>46</sup>. As can be seen, the agenda of priorities is mainly made up of domestic policy issues, for which the European dimension appears secondary for those who want solutions in these areas. Moreover, these are issues in which conservative parties have historically been considered more competent than progressive forces, and in which, given the general perception in Germany, populist movements such as AfD and BSW manage to carve out a space of consensus even if in practice the remedies proposed by them appear rather vague and difficult to implement.

The picture that emerges from these statistics, as well as from the European vote in Germany, is indeed that of a country affected by a deep sense of dissatisfaction, resignation and pessimism, both in the short and long term<sup>47</sup>. A major factor of concern comes from the economic situation, which only 34% of the statistical sample consider to be better in Germany than in the neighbouring European States, whereas it was 73% in 2019, and 12% consider the economic conditions in the country to be “good”.

The degree of satisfaction with the federal government is very low: according to a survey by Infratest dimap<sup>48</sup>, in the run-up to the European elections in 2024 barely 24% of voters were happy with the work of the Government coalition, while 76% were not. The figure was 74% and 79% in 1999 and 2004

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<sup>43</sup> Infratest.dimap, [ARD-DeutschlandTREND Mai II 2024](#), May 2024.

<sup>44</sup> J. ROOSE, [Die Stimmung vor der Europawahl 2024. Eine repräsentative Umfrage zu europapolitischen Einstellungen](#), Berlin, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 1.3.2024.

<sup>45</sup> V. NEU, [Die europafreundlichen Deutschen. Repräsentative Umfrage zu Einstellungen zu Europa in der deutschen Bevölkerung](#), Berlin, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 9.11.2023.

<sup>46</sup> Id.

<sup>47</sup> S. POKORNY, [Bäumchen wechsel dich? Politische Einstellungen im Wandel. Ergebnisse aus drei repräsentativen Trend-Umfragen](#), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Berlin, 18.2.2024.

<sup>48</sup> Results available at [ard.de](#), cfr. H. SCHWESINGER, [So viel Denkkzettel steckt im Wahlergebnis](#), 10.6.2024.

respectively, while according to a survey by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 29% of the sample thought the German federal government was working well<sup>49</sup>.

Despite the serious scandals that hit it during the election campaign<sup>50</sup>, AfD is the party that seems to have benefited most from this condition of distrust and pessimism. AfD voters now seem to have to some extent ‘stabilised’ the reasons for their choice, consolidating their convictions and isolating themselves from the criticism levelled at the party by the media and public opinion, which may also explain why the scandals that have affected many of its exponents do not dent the confidence of its voters. According to some analyses, moreover, the vote towards the extreme right is no longer merely a matter of protest and provoked by occasional reasons stemming from momentary discontents. Immigration, e.g., which seems to have motivated the vote for AfD in 46 per cent of the cases, is characterised as a long-lasting issue for voters more consistently linked to the extreme right: on this topic, is emblematic that 95 per cent of AfD voters say they like the fact that the party intends to tighten restrictions on the entry of refugees and asylum seekers into the country<sup>51</sup>.

Like AfD, Sahra Wagenknecht’s BSW list also bases its consensus on the dissatisfaction of citizens: even among these voters, the motivation for their electoral choice is based much more on substantive reasons than on a mere expression of protest against mainstream politics. Moreover, it does not seem to be possible to say for the time being that the emergence of the BSW will contribute to weakening the AfD: rather, a kind of alliance seems to be forming in the German electorate between extreme right-wing voters, who belong to the AfD, and extreme left-wing voters, who identify much more with the BSW than with the Linke. Almost three quarters of both agree e.g. with the statement that “unilateral support for Ukraine is damaging Germany”<sup>52</sup>, while 86% and 81% of AfD and BWS voters respectively fear “being marginalised if certain issues are discussed”<sup>53</sup>. For both BSW and AfD supporters, national political voting motivations exceed those of European politics (BSW 64:27%; AfD 72:19%)<sup>54</sup>.

The CDU/CSU are credited with the greatest political competence with respect to solving the problems currently afflicting Germany, ensuring peace in Europe and implementing an adequate defence policy (28, 27 and 30% of the sample respectively), whereas both the SPD and the other governing parties are currently credited with significantly less competence in these areas. On the other hand, in what used to be regarded as the strongest point in the Union’s competences, namely economic growth and the defence of German interests in the EU, while still excelling over the other parties the CDU/CSU registers a

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<sup>49</sup> FORSCHUNGSGRUPPE WAHLEN, [Europawahl](#), 10.6.2024.

<sup>50</sup> J. KAISER, [Germany’s scandal-ridden AfD rides steady wave of support into elections](#), The Parliament Magazine, 5.6.2024.

<sup>51</sup> Survey infratest.dimap, available [here](#).

<sup>52</sup> Survey infratest.dimap, available [here](#).

<sup>53</sup> Survey infratest.dimap, available [here](#).

<sup>54</sup> Id.

decline in the appreciation of its capabilities, respectively by 11 and 14 percentage points compared to 2019<sup>55</sup>. Otherwise, the Union excels in terms of recognised competences in all the other areas analysed, with the sole exception of the defence of social justice, where the SPD obtains better ratings, and environmental policies, where the Greens nevertheless remain the party credited with the highest competences<sup>56</sup>.

A central point in the reasons for the decline in popularity of the Greens is the fact that climate and environmental issues have lost relevance among the priorities of the German electorate compared to 2019. In the previous election campaign, climate policies had in fact been central to public opinion in Germany, and this had led to considerable success for the environmental party. In 2019, the Greens were considered to have the greatest competence in solving the climate emergency by 56% of German voters, whereas the same competence in 2024 was recognised by only 33% of the electorate<sup>57</sup>. The Greens' presumption of competence in foreign policy is also low, being recognised by only 12% of the sample - which is evidently a problem for the party whose leading figure Annalea Baerbock currently heads the Foreign Ministry. Finally, just 5 per cent of voters recognise the Greens' ability to drive the German economy forward - another problematic aspect, at a time when fears about the national economy are at the top of the list of issues of interest to the FRG electorate.

The SPD lags behind the CDU/CSU by 10 percentage points on defence competences, while it remains ahead on social justice, but only by 9 points compared to the Union (25% vs. 19%), and on the protection of the elderly (but only by 4% compared to the CDU/CSU). The decline in the electorate's esteem for the Social Democratic Party, especially when compared to the 2021 general election figures, is registered in all the main dossiers: foreign policy, fiscal policy and financial social justice<sup>58</sup>.

With regard to the FDP, just as in 2021, 15% of voters recognise its competence in fiscal and financial policy, and 11% with regard to the task of advancing the economy, while the party of Finance Minister Christian Linder loses 5 points in terms of confidence in its ability to act in economic policy compared to 2021.

Compared to 2019, the Linke loses support in its ability to take political action in more or less all the areas examined: 9 points less in the area of social justice, and 3 with respect to the handling of migration policy. The BSW, with which comparisons with the past clearly cannot be made, obtains the best ratings in the areas of social justice and the protection of peace, but still with values ranging between 5 and 6 per cent.

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<sup>55</sup> Survey [infratest.dimap](#), available [here](#).

<sup>56</sup> Id.

<sup>57</sup> Id.

<sup>58</sup> Id.

As far as electoral flows are concerned<sup>59</sup>, it should be noted that SPD loses the most support first to the abstainers (2,490,000) and CDU/CSU (1,450,000), and then to BSW (580,000), AfD (570,000), FDP (120,000) and Greens (80,000). The other majority parties, Greens and FDP, both lose mainly to the Union and abstainers, while losses to other parties, especially environmentalists, are much smaller. The Union subtracts support from all three government parties, as well as from the Linke, but gives up something to AfD, BSW and especially to the abstainers. AfD gains support from all the traditional parties (Union, SPD, Greens, FDP), but in turn loses support to BSW and abstainers. Finally, BSW subtracts votes from everyone, from right to left, but primarily from SPD and Linke. These figures seem to show a much more fluid German vote than in the past, with many voters willing to move from the left to the right, and in some cases to radicalise their choices. In addition, 5,400,000 voters of the traditional parties chose abstention, which given its size seems to have established itself as the main option resorted to by voters disillusioned by the political actors on the field, while supporters of extremist and populist formations may have expressed with their vote more convinced and less instinctive choices than in the past.

All in all, the European vote in Germany represented an announced shock, with which mainly domestic political issues were “settled”. Polls had long shown dissatisfaction with the governing parties, along with a concomitant growth of populist forces, in whose ranks AfD has been joined in recent months by BSW. In partial defence of the “traffic-light” majority, it should be mentioned that the one supporting the Scholz cabinet is the first in the history of the FRG to gather three parties. Until 2019, in fact, coalitions had always consisted of a maximum of two political forces: developing effective government action in an alliance of three instead of two, in which, moreover, at least one of the three parties (FDP) expresses positions on many issues quite different from the other two, inevitably becomes much more complex. Add to this the fact that in the three-year period 2021-2024 Germany, as well as the rest of the EU, had to deal with a series of serious crises (economic, war, energy, climate, post-pandemic) to an extent unprecedented in recent German history. In any case, the hesitations of the Executive and the sometimes very evident divisions within it have given the government and Chancellor Scholz an image of uncertainty, indecision and approximation that has undoubtedly alienated many voters who had rewarded them as recently as 2021.

The novelty that all politicians should take into account is that voter dissatisfaction no longer only finds an outlet in the traditional opposition parties: a considerable proportion of them opt for movements that are openly populist, anti-system and, at least in the case of AfD, exponent of positions bordering on compatibility with democratic principles. Limiting oneself to expressing satisfaction at the slap in the face

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<sup>59</sup> Data on electoral flows available [here](#).

of the government parties would therefore be a rather short-sighted choice, even on the part of CDU and CSU, whose alliance is currently the leading German party after the European vote. In terms of absolute votes, in fact, the Union has increased its support by about 760,000 compared to the general election of 2021: in the same timeframe, on the other hand, AfD gains over 1,5 million more votes, while the newcomer BSW obtains 2,453,652. Together, the two populist parties put together over 8,7 million preferences in the European vote: a figure that should worry anyone who cares about the values of democracy and the rule of law.

In the aftermath of the vote, CSU President and head of the Bavarian government Markus Söder<sup>60</sup> and CDU General Secretary Carsten Linnemann<sup>61</sup> called for Chancellor Scholz to resign as a result of the electoral defeat and for early elections. However, the request seems to have been quickly dismissed: probably because even within the Union not everyone is convinced that a rapid political vote could result in an advantage for the current opposition. The complex dossiers currently facing the Scholz government would all remain on the table, and whoever comes out on top in the elections would have to ask themselves from the next day onwards with whom they could conclude a reasonable and sufficiently stable coalition agreement to give the country a new Executive. Any reconfirmation of support for anti-system parties, possibly accompanied by a decline of traditional formations such as the FDP and Linke - which, according to the polls, might even fail to pass the threshold - would reduce the number of potential coalition partners for a Union leadership, unless one assumes that a barrier hitherto universally considered insurmountable for German conservatives would be broken down.

The barrier is that space on the right of the CDU/CSU, which until now has always been considered politically unapproachable territory by all traditional political forces in Germany. The decisive willingness not to open up to any kind of collaboration, even of mere passive tolerance in the votes of local and regional representative assemblies, aimed at emphasising the refractoriness of the German political class with anti-system formations that are dangerously close to anti-democratic ideals incompatible with the fundamental principles of the German constitutional order. Unlike in other European national contexts, loyalty to the value of anti-nazifascism has so far never been questioned.

CDU President Friedrich Merz still reaffirmed after the European vote the existence of an *Unvereinbarkeitsbeschluss*, a declaration of incompatibility between the Union and any extremist party, on the right as well as on the left. In fact, it is well known that CDU politicians in the eastern Länder are actually much more open-minded about possible understandings of some kind with the AfD, especially

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<sup>60</sup> [Söder fordert Scholz zum Rücktritt auf](#), stern.de, 10.6.2024.

<sup>61</sup> S. SCHRÖDER, [CDU-Generalsekretär Linnemann fordert Neuwahlen nach SPD-Debakel: „Bereiten uns auf Regierungsübernahme vor“](#), merkur.de, 11.6.2024.



if, as it seems, this were to emerge as the leading party in the three regional elections in the East scheduled for September 2024<sup>62</sup>.

Germany, in this way, stands as an archetype of the possible political structure of the EU of the future: as in Berlin, also in Brussels<sup>63</sup> it will be decisive to understand at what point in European conservatism, according to CDU/CSU and EPP, the *Brandmauer*, the impassable bank beyond which no collaboration whatsoever with those on the other side is tolerable. The future of German, and to a large extent European, identity will mainly depend on this.

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<sup>62</sup> D. DELHAES, [CDU-Chef Merz vergrößert seine Ost-Landesverbände](#), handelsblatt, 11.6.2024. In fact, in July 2023 Merz had raised the possibility of some form of local collaboration with the AfD, which he immediately retracted after the critical reactions of many CDU members to his statement, s. [Merz für pragmatischen Umgang mit AfD in Kommunen](#), ard.de, 23-7-2023.

<sup>63</sup> F. SCHINDLER, [AfD bejubelt „historisches Ergebnis“ – aber in Europa droht ihr die Bedeutungslosigkeit](#), welt.de, 9.6.2024.