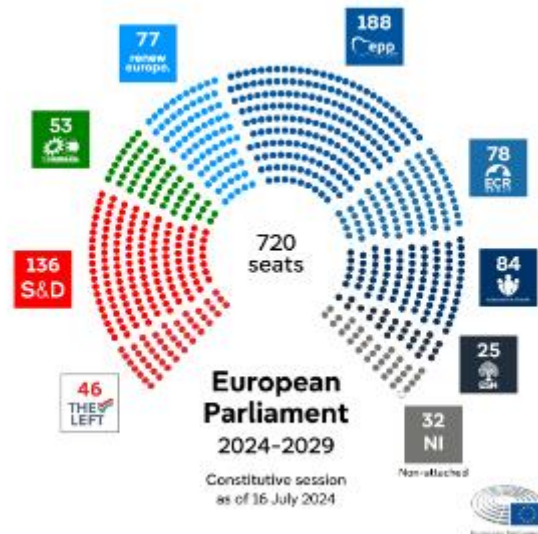


The left and the European agenda

A great sigh of relief was heard in the bourgeois, liberal editorial offices after the European Parliament elections. Although the radical right had made considerable gains in votes and mandates in many countries, the great danger had been averted. But what was the danger? Was there a threat of an absolute majority for the far right in the EU Parliament?

The relief was also linked to the spin that Ursula von der Leyen had used during the election campaign to move Giorgia Meloni's right-wing "European Conservatives and Reformers" group out of the dirty corner and into the circle of her potential partners. Above all, however, they were satisfied that the coalition of the European People's Party, Social Democrats and Liberals, which had previously dominated the European Parliament, still had a majority in the House. Business as usual, in other words, even if the Liberals have lost a quarter of their seats.

However, the new-old majority will be under considerably increased pressure from the right. Together, the three radical right-wing groups (the newly formed group "Patriots for Europe", "European Conservatives and Reformists" and the also new group "Europe of Sovereign Nations") have 187 seats. This is an increase of more than a third, more than the Social Democrats and almost as many as the Conservatives (188 seats). Hypothetically, conservative and right-wing parties have a majority in the European Parliament. Although the formation of a formal coalition between them is not a real political option today, the mere arithmetical possibility of it is a fact that is changing the European Parliament.



The new composition of the European Parliament corresponds with the shift to the right at member state level and thus in the European Council of Heads of State and Government, which is decisive for EU policy. Here, eleven prime ministers from conservative parties and five from various radical right-wing parties are now only matched by four social democrats and three liberals. If you expand the picture to include countries such as France, Belgium, Poland and Austria, where radical right-wing parties are in the antechamber of power, the extent of this worrying development becomes clear.

The Left

The Left Group in the European Parliament was credited with an increase from 37 to 41 seats on election night. In mid-July, it was joined by five members of the Italian Five Star Movement, meaning that it is now just behind the Greens with 46 seats.

The positive overall result includes various trends. La France Insoumise and the Northern European left-wing parties emerged stronger from the elections. The result of the Finnish Left Alliance, which two years ago had voted by a majority in parliament in favor of joining NATO, stands out in particular. In contrast, important parties of the EL, namely the German left and the communist parties of France, Spain and Italy, suffered defeats. The latter are no longer represented in the European Parliament.¹

The causes of the rifts between the left-green and communist parties, which ran with competing lists in the European Parliament elections in France, Italy and Spain, will not be discussed here. The northern European left-green parties, the Portuguese Left Bloc and La France Insoumise have in any case drawn the conclusion from the favorable election results that they should break away from the communist parties and the EL and attempt to found their own European party.

The complicated puzzle of the left in Europe²

Now the People" Alliance	EL parties (members and observers)	Other members of the EP Group
Left Alliance (FI) (17.3%)	Syriza (GR) (14.9%)	PCP (PT) ³ (4.1%)
Bloco de Esquerda (PT) (4.3%)	Izquierda Unida (ES) (4.7%) ³	Sinn Féin (IE) (11.1%)
La France Insoumise (9.9%)	déi Lénk (LU) (3.2%)	PTB (BE) (11.9%)
Podemos (ES) (3.3%)	KPÖ (AT) (3%)	
Red Green Alliance (DK) (7%)	PCF (F) (2.36%)	
Swedish Left Party (11%)	Rif.Com (IT) (2.2%)	
	AKEL (CY) (21.5%) *	Outside political group and EL
	KSCM (CS) (9.6%) ^{3*}	CP of Greece (9.3%)
	Sinistra Italiana (6.8%) ^{3*}	MERA 25 (GR) (2.5%)
	EuiA (Catalonia) ³	SP (NL) (2.0%)
	Bildu/Sortu (ES) (4.9%) ^{4*}	Nea Aristera (GR) (2.5%) ⁵
	The Left (2.7%)	

* Observer parties of the EL

¹ The PCF, Rifondazione Comunista and PCE each ran in alliances in the European Parliament elections.

² After Cornelia Hildebrandt: On the crises of the left-wing parties and opposing trends. PPP.

³ Izquierda Unida, whose strongest component is the PCE, took part in the elections as part of the red-green alliance Sumar. The CP of the Czech Republic ran as part of the patriotic alliance Stacilo, Sinistra Italiana as part of the alliance Verdi i Sinistra. EuA (Esquerra unida i alternativa) took part in the European Parliament elections as part of the Esquerra Republicana coalition. The Portuguese CP is the main component of the CDU electoral alliance.

⁴ Sortu is an observer party of the EL and is part of the Basque left-wing electoral alliance Bildu.

⁵ Nea Aristera has applied for full membership of the EL.

One criticism of the EL's constitution is that the composition of its committees and its decision-making procedures, as established at the last congress, no longer adequately reflect the balance of power within the left in Europe. This is also the view of the EL Executive Board. The historical structures of the EL and the principle of unanimity in decision-making, according to the assessment, are now proving to be an obstacle to the organizational and strategic development of the party. For this reason, and to discuss an alternative to the intended split in the redistribution of power and the funds obtained through EU party funding, it has put forward a structural reform programme and the holding of an extraordinary party conference for discussion. Following consultations with as many parties as possible within and outside the EL, a decision is to be taken in the autumn.

The EU agenda

Behind the debate about internal conditions, however, lurks a much bigger problem for the left, namely adapting its strategy to the drastically changed external political circumstances. An important course for the new period was already set before the elections. In addition to the migration pact, which enshrines the deadly and inhumane practice at the EU's external borders, this primarily concerns financial and economic policy. In the spring, the Commission, Council and parliamentary majority agreed to implement the "New Economic Governance Rules", which reinstate the strict rules on budget deficits and public debt of the Stability and Growth Pact, which were suspended during the pandemic, in a modified and in some cases stricter form. No more than six EU member states currently comply with these rules. For the others, they mean that they are obliged to adopt an austerity policy controlled by the EU Commission. Climate policy is directly affected by this, as experts estimate that an additional 120 billion euros (1.6 per cent GDP) of public investment is required to achieve the climate targets.⁶ However, only three countries, namely Denmark, Sweden and Ireland, will be able to do so under the regime of the reactivated austerity policy.⁷

The situation is exacerbated by NATO's decision to increase the share of member states' defense budgets in gross domestic product to at least 2 percent. You don't need to be a mathematical genius to realize that social budgets, public services and public investment will be the main victims of this pincer attack of austerity policies and armament programmes. In fact, the EU's participation in geopolitical confrontations threatens to usher in an era of social and ecological counter-reforms. The Secretary General of the European Trade Union Confederation, Esther Lynch, therefore sent an alarmed letter to the European progressive parties, calling on them to oppose attempts to roll back social rights and standards.

The extent to which wars and armaments are responsible for the climate crisis is an anathema in the public debate. But even a research paper published by the European Council under the paradoxical title "Greening the Armies" admits that the military and armaments are responsible for 5.5 per cent of global emissions.⁸ This means that the armed forces emit slightly less CO₂ than the EU but more than Russia and twice as much as civil aviation. The paper does not provide any information on the environmental impact of the wars currently being waged. However, we do

⁶ Mang, Sebastian/Caddick; Dominik (2024): Navigating Constraints for Progress: Examining the Impact of EU Fiscal Rules on Social and Green Investments, <https://www.etuc.org/en/publication/navigating-constraints-progress-examining-impact-eu-fiscal-rules-social-and-green> , p.12.

⁷ Ibid. S. 4.

⁸ European Council - Analysis and Research Team (2023): Greening the Armies, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/69607/art-greening-the-armies.pdf> , p.4.

know that in the first seven months of the war in Ukraine alone, 100 million tons of CO-2 were emitted, which is equivalent to the emissions of a medium-sized industrialized country like the Netherlands.⁹ It is also documented that more CO-2 was emitted in the first four months of the Gaza war than by 26 countries. If the construction and reconstruction measures are considered, the war-related emissions in Gaza at that time amounted to 61 million tons, which is roughly equivalent to Austria's annual emissions.¹⁰

The social and ecological effects of wars and the arms race are not a "political narrative" but exist as objectively as man-made climate change. This is why the EL also placed peace policy demands at the beginning of its election manifesto. This set it apart from all other parties in the election campaign.¹¹

Nothing without peace

In the guidelines speech before her election by the European Parliament, Ursula von der Leyen declared the establishment of a "genuine European defense union" to be a priority that affects all policy areas. The strategic autonomy of the EU, which was hyped until recently, was not mentioned once in her speech; instead, cooperation with NATO is to be expanded. Within one hundred days, the Commission intends to present its proposals for building the defense union in detail and in summary form in a White Paper¹². This puts the fundamental issues of war, rearmament and NATO on the EU's official agenda.

The resolution on the war in Ukraine, symbolically tabled by the People's Party, Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens in the first session of the new European Parliament, provides information on how the majority groups are responding. It calls on the member states to increase military support for Ukraine until its military victory. Together and individually, they should commit to spending no less than 0.25% of their GDP on this. The resolution notes with satisfaction that Ukraine is on an irreversible path to NATO membership. Finally, the EU's accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova are welcomed because they represent a geostrategic and democratic opportunity.¹³

The main message is not the often and rightly expressed condemnation of Russia's aggression, not even the call to continue supplying weapons to Ukraine, but the bellicose logic of ruling out any end to the war other than a victory on the battlefield as a possibility. Ending the war by diplomatic and political means is not even considered worth mentioning. But how many more hundreds of thousands of people are to be sacrificed to this logic? This blindness also leads to the declaration of Ukraine's NATO membership as an irreversible fact, although an internationally

⁹ Climate Focus (2023): Climate damage caused by Russia's war in Ukraine (First and second interim assessments), <https://climatefocus.com/publications/climate-damage-caused-by-russias-war-in-ukraine/>

¹⁰ Euro news (7 June 2024) Jet fuel, bombs and concrete: The 60 million tons of carbon generated by Israel's war on Gaza, <https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/06/07/jet-fuel-bombs-and-concrete-the-60-million-tonnes-of-carbon-generated-by-israels-war-on-ga>

¹¹ European Elections Manifesto 2024, <https://www.european-left.org/2024-eu-election-manifesto/>

¹² Ursula Von der Leyen (2024): Europe has a choice, Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024 - 2029, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_de?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_DE.pdf, p. 17 f.

¹³ European Parliament (17 July 2024): The need for the EU's continuous support for Ukraine, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-0003_DE.pdf

guaranteed neutral status for the country has been brought up by various parties as a building block for a peace solution.

Unlike the expansion of NATO, the planned EU enlargement could have a positive effect. But only if it is detached from the logic of war and emphasizes the social, economic and ecological aspects. Conversely, if EU enlargement is used as an instrument for the geostrategic enforcement of interests, it would lead to an increase in international tensions, wars and civil wars rather than to peace and prosperity.

The EU Parliament has no political competence in foreign policy. With this resolution, which is of symbolic importance, it is at odds with the views of the majority of EU citizens it represents, who are in favor of peace negotiations to end the war.¹⁴

Instead, however, we are witnessing an escalation of the war. Like sleepwalkers, the European elites are staggering towards the brink of a major war. The planned stationing of US medium-range weapons in Germany in two years' time and the foreseeable Russian reaction will further destabilize the situation.

In the current security policy crisis, the idea of a European army replacing the armies of nation states is sometimes raised. This idea raises more questions than it answers, such as whether and how the French nuclear forces would be integrated into such a Euro-army, or what role the non-aligned and neutral states would play in it. However, before discussing the means of security policy, it would be even more important to consider its objectives.

Europe needs a new, non-militaristic approach to security policy. Europe's strategic autonomy cannot be strengthened by rearmament, but only by a return to a peace policy.

In its manifesto, the EL calls for the principle of non-violent resolution of international conflicts to be enshrined in the EU treaties. It demands that the EU accede to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and make Europe a continent free of nuclear weapons. It calls for neutrality and non-alignment to be recognized as positive elements of a new European security order.

The 50th anniversary of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which will be celebrated next year, would be a good occasion to discuss the concept of common security on our continent on which it was based.

We are living in turbulent, dangerous times. The defense against the threat of war can become the bond that unites the peoples of Europe. This requires a European Left that is a party of peace without ambiguity. The differences in the left on security policy are serious and must be discussed publicly, but they do not justify a split. On the contrary, in view of the rise of the radical right, Europe needs a strong left that maintains its unity in diversity and deals with its controversies in dialogue.

¹⁴ See: European Council of Foreign Relations (July 2024): The meaning of sovereignty and European Views of Russia's War on Ukraine, [The meaning of sovereignty: Ukrainian and European views of Russia's war on Ukraine](#) | ECFR