

'Setback for the Left in the European elections' from Le Monde (12 June 1979)


Caption: On 12 June 1979, after the first elections to the European Parliament (EP) by direct universal suffrage, French daily newspaper Le Monde gives an overview, country by country, of the results of the ballot.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fauvet, Jacques. 12.06.1979, n° 10 688. Paris: Le Monde. "Recul de la gauche aux élections européennes", auteur:Maurice Delarue , p. 1 et 2.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/setback_for_the_left_in_the_european_elections_from_le_monde_12_june_1979-en-5c15f22d-f982-40e7-8c19-0eadb9a001df.html

Last updated: 06/07/2016



Setback for the Left in the European elections

— In France, the UDF (Union for French Democracy) consolidates its majority position, while the opposition Socialist Party loses further ground

— The Conservatives strengthen their positions in the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark and Luxembourg

— In Italy, the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats experience a new fall-off in votes

Although some results are still to come by the early afternoon of Monday, 11 June, particularly in the Netherlands and Ireland, it already seems that the European elections will be characterised by setbacks for left-wing parties almost everywhere. The European Parliament will be dominated by the centre-right.

— IN FRANCE, pending the final official results of the poll held on 10 June, which will be announced on Wednesday or Thursday, the 81 seats in the European Parliament will be allocated as follows: 25 to the UDF, 22 to the PS-MRG (Socialist Party and Movement of Radicals of the Left), 19 to the Communist Party and 15 to the RPR (Rally for the Republic).

Mr Jean Lecanuet, Chairman of the UDF, said on Sunday evening that he would suggest to his colleagues in the European People's Party, the umbrella organisation for Christian Democratic parties in Community countries, that Mrs Simone Veil should be nominated for the post of President of the new Parliament. In Germany, Mr von Hassel has done the same in his capacity as Chairman of the European Christian Democratic Union.

On Monday morning, Mrs Veil submitted to the Prime Minister a letter of resignation from her post as Minister for Health and the Family. Mr Jean-François Deniau, Minister for Foreign Trade, and Mr Pierre Méhaignerie, Minister for Agriculture, who are also on the Union for France in Europe list (in fourth and fifth positions), will probably wait for the results to be officially announced before also resigning.

The election has been characterised by a redistribution of votes within the ruling coalition to the benefit of the UDF, and within the Opposition, where the Socialist Party lost some votes.

On Monday morning, Mr Pierre Juillet announced that he had decided to 'resign from his post as adviser' to Mr Jacques Chirac.

While the candidates fielded by the four major parties (PCF, PS-MRG, UDF, RPR) secured 17 713 380 of the 20 142 493 votes cast (87.94 %), the smaller parties secured more votes than usual. The Ecology Movement was particularly successful, winning 4.40 %, which brought it close to the crucial 5 % threshold required for participation in the allocation of seats.

Most of the other EEC countries have seen serious setbacks for the left-wing parties.

— IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, where almost 70 % of voters abstained, the Conservatives secured 60 seats to Labour's 18.

— IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, the Social Democrats secured only 34 seats, while the CDU and CSU won 43.

— IN DENMARK, Mr Anker Jorgensen's Social Democrat Party was the big loser, although the 'National Front against the Common Market' managed to win four seats.

— IN LUXEMBOURG, where Mr Thorn lost the parliamentary elections held at the same time as the European election, three Christian Social candidates were elected, against only one Socialist and two Liberals.

— IN BELGIUM, the electorate proved to be less volatile, although voters in Flanders and Wallonia continued to demonstrate their significant differences.

— IN ITALY, the leading Christian Democratic and Communist parties, whose fortunes suffered a downturn at the last legislative elections, continued to lose ground to smaller secular and Socialist groups.

— IN IRELAND, where the vote-counting is very slow, Prime Minister Lynch's Fianna Fail party is expected to lose ground.

— IN THE NETHERLANDS, where votes are also being counted very slowly, the Prime Minister's Christian Democratic Party is expected to make slight gains.

The Centre-Right will dominate the Parliament

A downturn in Socialist fortunes and a strengthening of the centre and the 'pro-European' right in the European Parliament, with respectable but somewhat patchy voter turn-out: these are the major trends that stand out in the results — as of this Monday morning still incomplete — of the first European elections.

On average, the turnout was over 60 %. While this figure does not allow for any trumpet-blowing by the pro-Europeans and does not grant the newly elected Members the authority that they need to call for an increase in their powers, it is far from being the washout that many feared following Thursday's voting in four Community Member States (the United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands).

In comparison with Italy, where 85.9 % of the electorate voted even though national elections had just been held, and even with France, where 60.81 % of the electorate turned out, the United Kingdom is taking on an increasingly 'non-European' image, even though the Conservative majority and Government voted in at the general election in May appear considerably more 'European' than their predecessors.

The loss of Socialist votes is almost universal, except in Italy, where small Socialist parties benefited from voter disenchantment with the two big parties.

However, the causes of the phenomenon vary from one country to another. While, in France, the Socialists suffered because of fragmentation of the Left, elsewhere they suffered mainly from the wearing effect of being in power. In the United Kingdom, the effect was considerably accentuated by the electoral system (it is the only country in the Community which has first-past-the-post voting), which wipes out minorities, as well as by low voter participation. Labour voters, still stunned after losing the general elections, did not bother to turn out.

In West Germany, the ruling Social-Liberal coalition lost ground as a whole; Mr Brandt believes that the trend was intensified by votes for the Ecology Movement. In Denmark, the Social Democrat Party, whose leader, Mr Jorgensen, is Prime Minister, was the big loser at the polls. In Luxembourg, the Socialists lost a total of about 5 % of the electorate. As for Belgium, the Socialists also lost 5 % in Wallonia but gained ground in Flanders. In the Netherlands and Ireland, the overall results were still not available on Monday morning.

From these results and estimates, it may be predicted that the Socialists will probably constitute the largest political group in the European Assembly, but by a very narrow margin, holding 111 seats.

This will not be enough for them to be able to implement the 'Social Europe' that they promised, which is clearly the weakest element in the European Community's system. The Christian Democratic group (the European People's Party) may manage to win the same number of seats, but this is by no means certain.

Everything will depend on choices by the new Members, particularly the so-called 'giscardiens', who, before the election, were spread between the Christian Democratic and Liberal groups. At all events, the

Centre-Right, including Christian Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives, will hold the absolute majority. The pro-Europeans, particularly Mr Tindemans, formerly the Prime Minister of Belgium and a major winner in the Belgian elections, will play an important role.

However, there should be no illusions regarding this strong position of the pro-Europeans. The centrist majority is far from homogenous, and the make-up of the Parliament, with the disproportionate number of seats granted to the small countries and the heterogeneous nature of the ballot, means that, while it is more democratic than in the past, it still cannot be truly representative.

Maurice Delarue