

European issues

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European Election: what is at stake in the 2014-2019 legislature?

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Abstract :

One of the major issues at stake in these European elections is the appointment of the members of an institution, the European Parliament, which has now experienced an historic ascendancy in terms of its powers. It enjoys significant prerogatives in the normative, budgetary and surveillance spheres, finding voice by way of many decisions and votes during the legislature. From a partisan standpoint these elections are marked by a hesitant battle between the candidates who have been called to sit within the groups comprising the European People's Party (EPP) and the Socialists & Democrats (S&D), which are both due to come out ahead in the vote. From a political point of view these elections will result in the election of MEPs who will play a decisive role in addressing many issues during the 2014-2019 legislature [1].

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Indeed, the MEPs appointed in the May 2014 election will have to take decisions that entail many economic, social, environmental, political and diplomatic issues. Although it is not easy at this stage to lay out in detail the content of hundreds of draft directives, regulation, international agreements and settlements on which MEPs will have to vote it does seem possible to rank them schematically according to three major categories:

- How can the EU help resolve the crisis?
- What developments will there be in terms of European integration?
- What strategy should the EU adopt in terms of globalisation?

How can the EU help resolve the crisis?

Although it is primarily up to the Member States to define their strategy in terms of economic, social and environmental priorities (with very different results) MEPs will be able to influence the content of what the EU will provide in these areas.

It will be their responsibility to decide and assess the commitment of 959 billion euro in spending planned under the "multi-annual financial framework" 2014-2020 and adopted by the European Council and Parliament, ie to vote on annual budgets of all policies

financed by the European Union (agricultural, regional, social, transport infrastructure and energy policies). They will be responsible for guaranteeing the smooth implementation of the "Growth Pact" adopted in June 2012 including the contributions made by the European Investment Bank (EIB) or the increasing use of "project bonds". They will also have to review the "multi-annual financial framework" in terms of readjusting spending according to the sectors as well as deciding on the creation of new own resources for the European budget.

It will be moreover the new MEPs' responsibility to define how the deepening of the single market will move ahead: finalisation of the liberalisation of "network industries" (railways etc.), the liberalisation of the single services market (overcoming the "Polish plumber" etc.), creation of a truly single digital market, notably in terms of e-trade, increased competition in public procurement etc... They will furthermore have to approve external liberalisation measures that are under negotiation at present both on a community and international level in the area of trade and/or investment with the USA under the TTIP, with China, Japan, India, Mercosur, Vietnam etc ... Finally MEPs will have to continue working in order to regulate the financial services and the banking system as it has already been initiated: how should the banking sector's structure

1. To read the entire study,
<http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/doc/divers/des-visages-sur-des-clivages.pdf>

be reformed (separation of investment banks and savings banks), what crisis prevention, management and resolution regime should be adopted regarding financial establishments other than banks, how should the rules governing pension funds and professional retirement institutions be revised etc.? They will also have to assess and complete the European Banking Union to include a single surveillance mechanism under the aegis of the European Central Bank (ECB), a single bank resolution mechanism, as well as the possible creation of a European deposit guarantee fund. Last but not least, they will have to monitor the effective implementation of the financial transaction tax which has been launched under the enhanced cooperation of 11 Member States to date.

What developments will there be in terms of European integration?

Apart from the implementation terms of European financing, internal and external liberalisation and the regulation of financial services, other economic, social and even political conditions linked to the fundamentals of European integration (EMU, single market, the area of free movement and political union) will be submitted to the vote of the MEPs elected in May 2014.

Hence, they will have to take position on the management and development of the euro zone and the economic monetary union. They will do so by using their powers of control regarding the Commission and the ECB, including their participation in the work undertaken by the Troika (which should come to an end in the short and medium term, as is already the case in Ireland and Portugal); by adopting resolutions on the way the Council implements the stability and growth pact; by voting on proposals that aim to create the guidelines for a "euro zone budget" to help structural reform in member countries or to ensure macro-economic stabilisation within the EMU; and also by looking into the pooling of debt emissions Europe wide, for the financing of specific joint projects or that of new or old debts.

Not only will they also have to vote on stepping up the liberalisation of the single market they will also have

to address the conditions in which the single market operates. Will this entail the deepening of Social Europe, with for example, mobility aid, the promotion of social entrepreneurship (a statute of European foundation and solidarity) and even the introduction of a minimum wage in each Member State? Will it mean strengthening consumer protection via the adoption of new sanitary and phytosanitary norms, the management of the use of GMO's and even the protection of personal data? Will this involve fiscal cooperation, both to strengthen the fight to counter tax fraud and evasion or the laundering of capital, but also for the possible introduction of a joint consolidated based for company tax?

Additionally, it will be up to them to take a position in debates over the European area of free movement. Beyond the follow-up to the implementation of the directive on the monitoring of posted workers they will also have to vote on the "workers' mobility package" put forward by the Commission, which will notably focus on the revision of the regulations coordinating social security systems, and, more precisely the conditions according to which Europeans can access long term healthcare and unemployment benefit. They will have to vote on the management of the Schengen Area, i.e. the implementation of mobile border control within this area and the common control of the external borders, police and customs cooperation, civil protection, judicial cooperation in the penal and civil areas, etc.

Finally they will be responsible for the debate about the functioning and the nature of European political union. How will competences be distributed between the Union and the Member States? What balance will be found between federal action and State prerogatives? What "differentiation" will there be within the Union and what links will there be between the euro zone and "Grand Europe"? How will the European institutions be further democratised?

What strategy will the European Union adopt in terms of globalisation?

The MEPs elected in May 2010 will be called to take a series of international-scale decisions which will contribute to strengthening Europe's role in globalisation.

Apart from approving the trade agreements negotiated at present by the Union there are at least four other types of issues that will be subject to their judgement during their mandate.

Firstly, they will have to vote on the real implementation of parts of the new "energy-climate" package, a major component of the European strategy to counter climate change and energy transition in view of the renewal of the Kyoto Protocol in 2015. There will also be a vote on European goals in terms of climate and energy policies on the horizon of 2030: how can the amount of carbon in the economy be reduced, what action can be taken to improve energy efficiency, notably concerning buildings, what taxes could be applied to pollutant activities?

MEPs will at the same time have to take position on issues involving migration, the management of which is becoming increasingly European. What national and European policies could there be in terms of visas? What national/community strategies and action might be found to counter illegal immigration and how can European solidarity be strengthened in terms of the external borders? What policies can be drafted in terms of asylum rights and refugee reception? What vision of immigration and what types of integration strategies might be adopted in an ageing Europe, which now only comprises 7% of the world population?

They will have to decide on the nature of relations established by the EU and its neighbours which are a vital element in terms of the Union's security and prosperity – and also of the European continent as a whole. What types of association and partnership agreements might be shaped with the Arab and

Mediterranean countries, with Morocco or Tunisia for instance? What types of agreements and strategy might there be regarding our "Eastern" neighbours – firstly Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and even Russia? What kind of development might there be in terms of ongoing membership negotiations with Serbia, and Turkey and what preparation might be made for further enlargement?

The crises that have occurred in Africa (Mali, Central Africa) and in Ukraine should lead the newly elected MEPs to voicing their opinion on the conditions in which common positions and action might be forged in terms of foreign policy and defence. Apart from their vote on European spending commitments for development aid and humanitarian aid, beyond their votes on the fight to counter terrorism, they will have to make their voice heard regarding issues in which the European Union still requires a great amount of work in terms of integration.

As a whole they will take a series of decisions that will have notable effect on the living conditions of European citizens, the content of which will depend on the political power balances that emerge after the election on 22nd-25th May. By voting for candidates whose positions and proposals best match their preferences Europeans will be exercising the power granted to them by direct universal suffrage.

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ANNEX

TABLE Main issues at stake in the 2014-2019 legislature

MAIN ISSUES	EXAMPLES
<p>How will the EU help resolve the crisis? (Growth and employment)</p>	<p>Agricultural and regional policies. European Youth Guarantee Interconnection Mechanism in Europe Liberalisation of services and e-trade Free Trade Treaty with the USA Regulation of banking sector/banking union/Financial transaction tax</p>
<p>What developments will there be in terms of the basis of European integration? (euro, single market, free movement, political union)</p>	<p>Implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact Euro Zone Budget Common Base for company tax Posted Workers European access to social security Cooperation in the Schengen Area Distribution of competences between EU and Member States</p>
<p>What strategy will the European Union adopt in terms of globalisation? (EU-Neighbourhood, foreign policy, energy-climate, immigration)</p>	<p>Energy/Climate Package External Border Management Visas and asylum rights Development aid and humanitarian aid Membership negotiations with Turkey and Serbia Association agreements with Morocco and Ukraine Relations with Russia</p>

Source : Yves Bertoncini et Thierry Chopin