

---

## EU, post-vote unknowns. The comments of Europe's Catholic world

(Brussels) Now that the overall results are known (the seats won by the national political parties, the MEPs elected, the future composition of the political groups in the Strasbourg assembly, etc.), the elections for the renewal of the European Parliament offer a wealth of food for thought. Needless to say, the European elections - a non-national vote - have sent shockwaves across national political landscapes. France, Belgium, Germany and other countries have already had a taste of this.

Interesting reflections are also being made on the turnout (at EU level, voter turnout increased slightly to 50.93% compared to 50.66% in 2014 or, by way of another comparison, 45.47% in 2004) and on the growing support for nationalist or populist groups, which the European Bishops of COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union), among others, have warned against. SIR has gathered opinions and comments from the European Catholic world in the light of these elections. **Austria.** According to **Wolfgang Mazal**, president of the Catholic Laity Council (KlrÖ), the European elections have produced "contradictory" results. On the one hand, he notes, there is a "widespread popular discontent with the political performance of recent years." On the other, however, he sees a "clear trend towards a stronger political centre". According to Mazal, the major political challenge of the coming months will be the alliance of the centrist parties (referring to the People's Party, the Social Democrats and the Liberals) in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, "in order to reach an agreement on lasting cooperation in the upcoming European Parliament." Mazal calls for "credible policies that defend European values and promote social cohesion".

**Germany.** Among the various issues addressed by the President of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZDK), **Irme Stetter-Karp**, in the light of the results of the European elections, she points out that "the EU must continue to support the EU accession candidate countries in the coming legislative term." "Whether it's Georgia, Moldova, the Western Balkans or Ukraine, it's time for enlargement and institutional reforms." The answer to geopolitical challenges "is a strengthened European capacity to act. This includes qualified majority decisions, especially in foreign and security policy." **Marie von Manteuffe**, the ZDK's spokesperson for European policy, is worried about the "rise of radical, extremist and far-right parties." The centrist pro-European majority now bears even greater responsibility for making the EU stronger and more secure. Solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability must remain the guiding principles of European policy."

**Spain.** **Carlos Herrera of Radio Cope**, promoted by the Spanish Bishops' Conference, offers his analysis of the national political landscape. He notes that the People's Party has emerged victorious in the European elections. If these elections had been planned as a plebiscite between Sánchez (the Socialist Prime Minister) and Feijóo (PP leader), the Galician would have won by four points over Sánchez. The PP's electoral base is solid, but so is the PSOE's". For Herrera, the European elections "have a single electoral constituency and a low turnout, which is not very helpful when it comes to drawing clear conclusions. Moreover, compared to national elections, people vote differently in European elections, and voters also indulge in a degree of extravagance." **Portugal.** **Fábio Monteiro** of the Portuguese Bishops' Conference's Rádio Renascença remarked: "If the European elections can be seen as a barometer of the national vote, then the Portuguese people's political consensus has not changed much since March 10 (the last general election - ed.'s note). This is certainly true for the two parties with the most votes: the Socialist Party (PS) and AD, the centre-right coalition. But while three months ago the AD won by a narrow margin, this time it was the PS that emerged victorious. At the same time, it became clear that Chega (a nationalist party) "has suffered the biggest defeat on election night. With 9.8% it elected only two MEPs." **Romania.** Fr **Tarcziu Serban**, professor of theology at the Roman Catholic Faculty of Theology at the University of Bucharest, told SIR: "This year, although the election campaign focused on the local elections rather than the European Parliament elections - which were held simultaneously - the turnout in the European elections in Romania (52.42%) was higher than in the local elections (50.02%). Moreover, the turnout in the European elections was the highest since Romania joined the EU. Romanians have taken a real

---

interest in the fate of the EU, and the results so far show that the majority of elected candidates are members of pro-European parties. However, Romanian Eurosceptics have also won seats in the European Parliament, supported by the Romanian 'diaspora', probably influenced by Western European trends. This is certainly an important moment for Europe, but we hope that the values that were imprinted on it by the founding fathers will always prevail." **Bulgaria.** The strengthening of nationalism, which is reflected in the results of the European elections, is certainly no good news for Europe," Balkan analyst **Nikolay Krastev** told SIR. In his view, "it will aggravate the confrontation between EU countries, and the attitude towards the war in Ukraine will be a clear indication of this." According to Krastev, "many nationalist parties are linked to Russia." "Unquestionably, the outcome of the vote leaves little room for optimism, also with regard to the European integration of the Western Balkans. The outcome of the European vote does not bode well for a serious EU engagement on this issue." **Lithuania.** **Ieva Petronytė-Urbonavičienė**, journalist for the Catholic online newspaper 'Bernardinai', reflects on the elections in Lithuania, a Baltic country and neighbour of Russia. "Only slightly more than a quarter, or 28.35 per cent, of Lithuanian voters have exercised their right to vote. Compared to the last European elections, which coincided with the Lithuanian presidential elections, the turnout was lower. The only time turnout had been lower was in 2009, when 21 per cent of the electorate went to the polls." Meanwhile, "the EU and the European Parliament have become more important. This is influenced by the geopolitical context. For Lithuanians, the security aspect of the EU is very important." **Caritas Europe.** "Support for solidarity and global justice". This is the appeal of Caritas Europe, also in the light of the growth of right-wing parties. "It is important to build a Europe that is socially inclusive. For a third of EU citizens, poverty is a matter of urgent concern." Secretary General **Maria Nyman** says Caritas Europe "will work for an EU that is open to migration, global justice and sustainable development." **The United Kingdom.** Out of the EU, but not out of Europe, comes the UK. "The growth of right-wing parties is a challenge for Europe and for the Church. If European and national political groups succeed in investing in the poorest regions, in those areas that are far from the capitals, those that are experiencing marginalisation and are drawn to nationalist movements, this challenge will be won. At the moment, people living in the suburbs, even if they are not poor, feel misunderstood by the centre." **Francis Davies**, a Catholic political analyst and lecturer at the universities of London, Birmingham and Oxford, comments on the European election results for SIR. "Whereas in the post-war period European politicians were familiar with the needs of the most remote and marginalised areas of the country, politicians based in the capital are unaware of the needs of those living in the suburbs. He then adds: "The fact that the political centre has held its ground offers Labour leader Keir Starmer, who is predicted to win the UK general election on 4 July, the possibility of a new, closer partnership between the UK and the EU.".

*(written in collaboration with Carlo Galasso, Cristina Grigore, Silvia Guzzetti, Massimo Lavena, Iva Mihailova, Sarah Numico)*

Gianni Borsa