

EU-28 WATCH



No. 10
July 2014

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-28Watch.org

EU-28 Watch

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On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

The EU-28 Watch No. 10 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the "*Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung*", and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament election

Julian Plottka

Low Interest in Europeanised Campaigns

The following EU level issues were the main points of discussion during the campaigns: migration policies and free movement of workers within the EU in conjunction with the allegation of social benefits fraud; European bureaucracy; the scope of EU competences and subsidiarity; youth unemployment and austerity; and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. With the exception of the free movement of workers, none of these issues provoked a polarised debate. The media coverage was rather low, while the Ukrainian crisis was the most important EU issue in German media in April/May 2014. The Socialist party 'Die Linke' tried to campaign by criticising the German Foreign Minister's (Frank-Walter Steinmeier) Ukraine policy. Leading candidate of the Christian Social Union (CSU), Markus Ferber, made a similar attempt to criticise him. But in general, national politics were dominating the headlines during the European election campaigns.

Variable Visibility of the 'Spitzenkandidaten'

In addition to visibility gained through his lengthy preparations for candidacy as 'Spitzenkandidat' (front-runners) for the Party of European Socialists, Martin Schulz was also very visible in his campaign as frontrunner of the SPD. In a last-minute campaign Martin Schulz even advertised "Vote Social Democratic to have a German becoming Commission President." In the last polls before the European elections 39 percent of German voters wanted him to become the next President of the European Commission (compared to the 22 percent of voters favouring Jean-Claude Juncker).

The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) were shy with their party family's 'Spitzenkandidat', Juncker, and their own frontrunner, David McAllister, who was a defeated Prime Minister of Lower-Saxony. While the latter hardly appeared in public, the former was only a little more visible. Schulz and Juncker participated in two TV debates, which were followed by media comments criticising their political similarity. Most of the regional branches of CDU/CSU decided not to print Juncker's portrait on posters, and instead, posters showing Angela Merkel hung all over Germany. The CDU Vice President of the European Parliament, Rainer Wieland, commented: "Only with Merkel we can reach voters."

The other EU-wide 'Spitzenkandidaten' were hardly visible. 'Die Linke' followed the CDU strategy and did not campaign with Alexis Tsipras, but featured their national politicians. The Green 'Spitzenkandidatin' from Germany, Ska Keller, was slightly more visible, but the national frontrunners dominated the Green campaign in Germany. The Liberals (FDP) were hardly visible and also focused on their national frontrunner, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff.

Commentators on the next steps to elect the President of the European Commission are split in two camps: one group argues that it was foreseeable that the European Council will not respect the voters' decision and the other group was expecting that it will nominate the winning 'Spitzenkandidat'.

However, both camps criticise that Juncker has not been nominated yet. Mathias Döpfner, publisher of the German newspaper Bild, wrote that '[a] third [candidate], who didn't stand for election, can't be allowed to get the job.' The Brussels correspondent of the public broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Rolf-Dieter Krause, commented: 'Mr. Cameron is important, but 370 million voters are more important.' Philosopher Jürgen Habermas declared the latter option to be 'wilful damage' of EU democracy. German Vice Chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel, considered the latter option the 'biggest act of dumbing down the people'. The SPD backs Juncker, while the Greens declare that only a 'Spitzenkandidat' can become Commission President. Even a considerable number of Christian Democrats expected Merkel to support Juncker including: Elmar Brok, MEP, Gunther Krichbaum, chair of the EU affairs committee in the Bundestag, and Peter Altmaier, Head of the Federal Chancellery. He called the support of the European Parliament political groups' chairs for Juncker 'the beginning of a democratic (r)evolution: History in the making!' Obviously Merkel had not expected the support to be so widespread when she refused to back him during the informal European Council meeting on 27 May 2014. It took three more days until she declared her support for Juncker.

Eurosceptics: A New Party in Town

Founded in 2013, the 'Alternative für Deutschland' (Alternative for Germany - AfD) is in opposition to the German government's Euro zone policy. It failed to pass the barrier clause in the last federal elections, but received 7 percent of votes in the European elections. They campaigned for the exit from the Euro zone, of either the programme countries or Germany. Furthermore, they complained about not being treated fairly in the media and by other parties, as well as about damaged campaign posters.

So far, it is unclear whether the AfD is a short-term protest party or a new right-wing member of Germany's party system. Exit polls reveal that AfD voters are evenly distributed over all parts of society. Only voters holding low educational degrees are less likely to vote for the AfD, what counters the short-term protest party assumption. To date, it is still unclear whether the AfD is a Eurosceptic or a right-wing extremist party. This will depend on whether the Liberal or the National Conservative group within it will become dominant. Both groups agree on Eurosceptic positions but quarrel about the party manifesto, which has not yet been adopted. During its campaign, the AfD tried to present itself as not being an extremist party even if some of its campaign posters displayed a slogan used by the right-wing extremist NPD ("Wir sind nicht das Weltsozialamt" – We are not the global welfare welfare office").

But the AfD already had direct impact on the other parties, especially the CDU and CSU, which fear the establishment of a new right-wing party. First, all parties, except the Greens, demanded more subsidiarity in EU policy. Second, the CSU followed a double track approach in its campaign. It promoted pro-European policy, while presenting itself as a Eurosceptic party. It campaigned against the EU accession of Turkey and the free movement of workers, assuming that they seek social benefits. While the CDU presented itself more pro-European, some CDU politicians followed the CSU strategy. Elmar Brok, for instance, proposed compulsory fingerprint controls for Bulgarian and Romania EU citizens moving to Germany. For the CSU this strategy did not pay off. The CSU lost 7.6 percent while the AfD had a vote share of 8 percent in Bavaria.

A.O.B: Initiative for a European Electoral System

The most notable result of the 2014 European elections in Germany was an increased turnout of 48.1 percent compared to 43.3 percent in 2009. A first explanation for this increase was the success of the 'Spitzenkandidaten' campaign. The other argument given, were the local elections and a referendum held in twelve German 'Länder'. While the turnout in regions with a second election

ranged from 43 to 56.9 percent, the turnout in regions without another poll ranged from 40.3 to 48.1 percent.

While there were not many comments analysing the results of the CDU (-0.7 percent; Angela Merkel's EU policy), SPD (+ 6.5 percent; Martin Schulz's success and low result in 2009), Greens (-1.4 percent; stabilised compared to last federal elections) and Socialists (-0.1 percent; no EU policy concept) the discussion focussed on the CSU (-7.6 percent in Bavaria), the Eurosceptic AfD (+7.0 percent) and the FDP (-7.6 percent). After having failed to win a single seat in the last federal elections, the majority of comments on the FDP's result assumed that the party's renewal needs more time, if at all possible.

Seven additional new parties won a seat in the European Parliament after the German constitutional Court ruled the 3-percent threshold for the European Parliament elections to be unconstitutional in February 2014. Among them are four single issue parties, an umbrella organisation of local electoral initiatives, a satire party and a right-wing extremist party. Foreign Minister Steinmeier was the first to criticise that single-issue and satire parties in the European Parliament do not increase the representativeness of German politics. He proposed an EU-wide electoral system, including a threshold, to secure the proper functioning of the European Parliament.

Links:

- Peter Altmaier, [Twitter](#), 27 May 2014.
- EurActiv.com, [Sigmar Gabriel: Don't cheat voters out of EU elections](#), 6 May 2014.
- Jürgen Habermas, [Europa wird direkt ins Herz getroffen](#), 30 May 2014.
- Rolf Dieter Krause, [Merkel plant in aller Offenheit einen Betrug](#), 29 May 2014.
- Philip Olterman, [Merkel backs Jean-Claude Juncker for European commission president](#), 30 May 2014.
- Dario Sarmadi, [German centre-right: 'Only with Merkel can we reach voters'](#), 24 April 2014.

2. The EU's Neighbourhood

Dr. Katrin Böttger

Between 'Putin-understanders' and sceptics

The views in Germany concerning Russia are largely shaped by the Ukrainian crisis, which has been ongoing since November 2013. All German parties have condemned the separation of Crimea and annexation by Russia as a violation of international law. In reaction to this, the dominant view in Germany is nonetheless that Russia should be included in any talks concerning the future of Ukraine and that bridges should not be destroyed but rather good neighbourly relations should be attempted.

Overall, Germany and Russia relations are seen as important not only but also because of the energy relations and energy dependency that Germany has vis-à-vis Russia.

However, there was also an intellectual fight accusing Putin-understanders ("Putin-Versteher") of putting too much blame for the Ukraine crisis on the EU itself and giving Putin too much leeway in annexing Crimea. The politicians labelled "Putin-Versteher" including the Coordinator of German-Russian Intersocietal Cooperation Gernot Eler (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and the socialist party "Die Linke" defended their position by arguing that one needs to understand Russia in order to negotiate with the government, without implying sympathy for Putin's decision. Concerning other issues of cooperation such as the Iran talks it is not felt that relations have worsened, the crisis does

not seem to have had an impact on these talks, therefore no need to change relations with Russia in this regard is seen.

In the public, Putin's reputation has suffered, and an increasing number of Germans see him critically, a trend, however, that started 10 years ago, long before the Ukrainian crisis.

The Eastern partners: beyond 'enlargement light'

The general understanding in Germany is that regardless of the crisis in Ukraine, the signing of the association agreements with Moldova and Georgia should continue to be pursued. In addition, there is increased support to accelerate processes allowing citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries visa free travel to the EU, which was first granted to Moldovans in April 2014.

The German position is well presented in the common declaration of the three foreign ministers of the 'Weimar Triangle', Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Germany), Laurent Fabius (France) and Radoslaw Sikorski (Poland), which states that the Eastern Partnership should not force the neighbouring countries into having to choose to cooperate either with the EU or Russia but should be designed to make both possible, even if a customs union and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) are difficult to align technically.

In this regard, there is also a renewed interest to attempt to revive ideas and concepts regarding an economic union from Lisbon to Wladiwostok. In addition, there is support for the idea to take Russian reservations into consideration concerning DCFTAs with the Eastern Partnership countries regarding trade relations with Russia. There is a feeling that once the crisis in Ukraine is overcome, the Eastern Partnership should be reformed. First suggestions on how this improved Eastern Partnership should be shaped include moving away from the 'Enlargement light' concept towards more individual approaches to the different countries including those reluctant to deepen relations with the EU such as Azerbaijan and Armenia. In addition, the need for a more strategic and long-term approach is felt which would include prioritising supporting the neighbouring countries over more distant countries. With the election of the European Parliament and a new Commission including a new President as well as a new High Representative on the horizon, many suggest that the European Union External Action Service should be strengthened further.

Turkey's EU bid: a narrowing gap between left and right

The overall position in Germany concerning Turkish EU membership has become more sceptical and reluctant or outright opposed in recent months and years. Compared to previous electoral programmes for the European election, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) did not reiterate that enlargement should be 'done by the book' (which continues to be the Federal parties' position) but that they oppose Turkish membership based on the fact that they do not fulfil the criteria. The Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) holds the same position, clearly stating that they are against Turkish membership in the EU by arguing that this would overburden both the EU and Turkey.

In addition, parties that were in the past clearly in favour of membership (Greens, Social Democrats) are now more reluctant in their wording. However, the Social Democrats stated that they would pursue the negotiations with the goal of membership. And the Greens agree that Turkey does not currently fulfil the necessary criteria but that the EU should be open and continue supporting its democratic process.

Besides difficulties in the negotiations this is clearly attributed to the politics, especially of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, concerning protests at Gezi Park in 2013 and media and internet freedom in 2014. The country's development and Erdogan's politics were discussed widely and extensively around the

time of his official visit to Berlin on 4 February 2014 as well as his visit to Cologne on 24 May 2014 which was not officially an election rally but was nevertheless still seen by many as such causing controversy among German politicians on allowing such events as well as among the Turkish community in Germany.

Links:

- Katrin Böttger, [Time to hit the reset button: the Eastern Partnership after the Vilnius Summit and the role of Russia](#), 19 March 2014.
- The Economist, [Germany's ambivalence towards Russia reflects its conflicted identity](#), 10 May 2014.
- German Federal Government, [Europe will give resolute response, says the chancellor](#), 20 March 2014.
- German Foreign Office, [Building a stronger compact with our neighbours](#), 1 April 2014.

3. Power relations in the EU

Dr. Funda Tekin

Germany – living up to its European responsibility

Germany has the strongest economy in the European Union and it faces ambiguous expectations from its fellow EU Member States. Countries that were badly hit by the Eurocrisis accuse Germany of pressuring them to stick to a strict austerity course. Other countries – mostly smaller EU Member States – perceive Germany's role within the EU on a more positive account. And yet others blame Germany for not sufficiently taking up its European responsibility calling Germany the 'reluctant hegemon'.

The debate in Germany is strongly influenced by the question of how the country can live up to its responsibility resulting from its relative economic strength and size of population. The Federal President, Joachim Gauck, claims Germany's reluctance to take on more responsibility to be linked to the context of German history. Citing Hanna Arendt who claimed in 1950 that Germans had fallen in love with powerlessness, he calls on Germany to take on more responsibility. In doing so, Germany needs to balance its action well between imposing its will on others and doing too little in order to avoid risks or conflict (Joachim Gauck 2013).

The general perception in the country is that Germans should not be too self-critical and should be aware of the fact that leading does not necessarily imply dominating (Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung). This debate also highlights that the reforms aimed at solving the Eurocrisis and determining a stricter austerity course were not decided by Germany alone but were subject to consensus among all EU Member States. The aim of the new coalition government in Germany is to forge a strong and responsible role for Germany within the EU. This role is defined within the context of the European integration process in which Germany needs to function as 'motor of integration'. The German public acknowledges the strengths of the country but is reluctant to accept a role as 'benevolent hegemon' (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung).

Links:

- Joachim Gauck, [Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck to mark the Day of German Unity Stuttgart](#), 3 October 2013.

- Joachim Gauck, [Germany's role in the world: Reflections on responsibility, norms and alliances](#), 31 January 2014.
- Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung et.al., [Europa-Atlas](#), 6 May 2014.
- Konrad Adenauer Foundation, [Führen heißt nicht dominieren](#), 29 May 2012.

Austerity vs. growth – are they really mutually exclusive?

In terms of budgetary discipline Germany, which had a debt-rate of 78.4 percent of GDP, a deficit-rate of 0 percent and an unemployment rate of 6.6 percent in 2013, counts as the model-state within the European Union. Therefore, the main focus of the German debate on austerity and growth are the preferred reform options at the European level rather than the actual effects that austerity policy might have on the German economy and the labour market.

In general, the preferred policy options at the European level are a stricter austerity course. This has been strongly promoted by the subsequent German governments. In this context, however, it is emphasised that this policy preference does not imply that growth is not a priority for Germany. On the contrary the generation of sustainable growth is discussed as one of the top priorities of German policy. The general conviction is that austerity and growth are not mutually exclusive because the essential element that generates sustainable growth is structural reforms.

This general conviction was subject to a more intense debate in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in Germany in October 2013. The former government parties CDU/CSU and FDP fiercely defended their stricter austerity policy preferences, whereas the then opposition parties SPD and the Greens took a more critical stance. The party 'Die Linke' even predicted endless austerity an economic and social dead-end. The Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany – AfD) castigates the Euro-politics as a whole calling it an absolute failure. This debate included the question of Eurobonds that were heatedly discussed by the SPD that was in favour and the CDU/CSU that rejected Eurobonds as unconstitutional. Nevertheless, the new coalition government of CDU/CSU and SPD has been able to find agreement on the common approach towards austerity and growth: it rejects the communitarisation of national debts as well as agreed on the importance of structural reforms and sustainable investment in order to foster growth in Europe and on the credible implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact.

Recently, the debate on the Stability and Growth Pact was reanimated. During his electoral campaign for the European Parliament Elections Martin Schulz, the candidate of the European Socialists, was labelled an 'Italian look alike' by the CDU because he promoted the renunciation of the strict austerity policy. Additionally, at the occasion of a visit to France in June 2014 the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Sigmar Gabriel stated his support to an initiative of several southern EU member states asking for a revision of the Stability and Growth Pact that would render it more flexible. He pointed at the difficult times of structural reforms in Germany at the beginning of the 21st century and emphasised that it took several years before the structural reforms of the social system and the labour market, the 'Agenda 2010', took its desired effect. Gabriel's statement has intensified the debate and his coalition partners from the CDU hurried to confirm that the government was convinced that the Stability and Growth Pact already provided sufficient flexibility.

Links:

- Sebastian Dullien, [Reinventing Europe: Explaining the Fiscal Compact](#), 1 May 2012.
- Euractiv, [Euro Finance](#), undated.

The UK: Don't let the singer sing his song!

This report is part of the EU-28 Watch No. 10. For citation please use the full report available at: <http://www.eu-28watch.org/>.

The German government acknowledges that the United Kingdom (UK) is a difficult partner within the European Union. At the same time it emphasises the importance of keeping the UK on board. Both the Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Franz-Walter Steinmeier underlined the common values and interests shared by Germany and Britain upon their visits to London in 2014. Merkel repeated this argument in a government declaration in June 2014. She criticised the levity of those who in line with the saying “let the singer sing his song” claimed the irrelevance of whether the UK would remain in or exit the EU. She stated that the UK was a strong ally of Germany and contributed substantially to the common European foreign policy. Common interests include the internal market and a closer cooperation to strengthen the EU’s role as a global actor.

Against this background, Merkel does not seem prepared to put British EU membership at risk over the currently heated debate on Jean-Claude Juncker’s candidacy for the post of the new President of the European Commission (Spiegel 24/2014).

The support of continued British EU membership is shared by the opposition parties in the current *Bundestag*. 85 percent of the electorate of the Green Party and 35 percent of “Die Linke” are in favour of UK membership (IP-Forsa-Frage).

Links:

- Angela Merkel, [Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel in London](#), 27 February 2014.
- Deutsche Welle, [Steinmeier urges UK to stay in EU, voices doubt on treaty change](#), 3 February 2014.
- Euractiv, [Topics: Great Britain](#), undated.
- Internationale Politik, [Keine EU ohne die Briten](#), 1 January 2013.
- Spiegel, [Zu viele eckige Kreise](#), 7 June 2014.