The June 2024 European Parliament Elections: Outcome and Implications

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The 27 member states of the European Union (EU) held elections for the 720 members of the European Parliament (EP) between June 6 and 9, 2024. The only directly elected EU institution, the EP represents the bloc's nearly 450 million citizens and has a role in approving most EU legislation. As the EP has accumulated more power over time, Congress has engaged it on certain aspects of U.S.-EU relations, including through forums such as the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue. Electoral gains for parties considered *euroskeptic*—that is, critical of the EU or anti-EU to varying degrees—may influence the functioning of the EP and the EU and the conduct of U.S.-EU relations. (See also CRS In Focus IF11211, *The European Parliament and U.S. Interests*, and CRS Report RS21372, *The European Union: Questions and Answers*.)

Election Results

Members of the EP (MEPs) serve five-year terms and typically represent around 200 national political parties. MEPs organize into groups that caucus according to political orientation rather than nationality. A political group must consist of at least 23 MEPs from a minimum of seven EU countries. In the 2019- 2024 EP, there were seven political groups; in the new EP, there are eight. Some MEPs are "nonattached" or independent.

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Table 1. The European Parliament

Political Group

2019-2024

Seats

as of June 9, 2024

2024 Election

Results

as of July 23, 2024

European People's Party (EPP; center right) 176 188

Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D; center left) 139 136

Patriots for Europe (PfE; formerly Identity and Democracy or ID; far right, euroskeptic) 49 84

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR; right wing, euroskeptic) 69 78

Renew Europe (RE; centrist, liberal) 102 77

Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA; greens and regionalists) 71 53

The Left (far left and former communists) 37 46

Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN; far right, euroskeptic) — 25

Nonattached 62 33

Total Seats 705 720

Source: European Parliament, European Election Results. **Note:** The overall size of the new EP increased due to EU demographic changes.

As seen in **Table 1**, the center-right EPP and center-left S&D remain the two largest groups in the new EP, whereas centrist RE and the Greens/EFA lost seats. Two euroskeptic groups—the far-right PfE (formerly ID) and the right-wing ECR—gained seats, in part due to voter concerns about migration, the economy, and EU climate policies. Average turnout was 51%.

Although some euroskeptic parties in the EP are on the left or far left, most are on the right or far right and sit in the new EP in PfE, ECR, or ESN. Some in PfE and ECR sought to merge the two groups, but rivalries and policy divisions (including attitudes toward Russia) posed obstacles. PfE edged out ECR to become the third-largest group with the addition of several parties, including the national-conservative Hungarian party led by Prime Minister Viktor Orban. ESN is farther right and more stridently euroskeptic; it is spearheaded by a far-right German party expelled from ID in May 2024.

Pro-EU groups (EPP, S&D, RE, and Greens/EFA) retain a combined majority in the new EP, but voting coalitions may vary by policy issue. Euroskeptic MEPs could influence EP positions on issues such as migration, climate change, and EU integration and enlargement, especially if the EPP or other groups embraced similar views. Before the election, EPP leaders indicated openness to cooperating with parties to its right that are pro-Europe, pro-Ukraine, and pro-rule of law (primarily some in ECR, such as the party of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni).

EU member states are required to take EP election results into account in choosing the president of the European Commission (the EU's executive body). The EP must approve the commission president by a majority vote and maintains that the post should go to the "lead candidate" of the political group that wins the most EP seats. In late June 2024, EU member states nominated the EPP's lead candidate, incumbent commission president Ursula von der Leyen, to serve a second term. Von der Leyen faced uncertain support in the EP due to heightened fragmentation, divisions on some of her positions (especially on climate issues), and weak political group discipline. The EP confirmed von der Leyen for a second term in July 2024 by a vote of 401 in favor to 284 against. A majority of MEPs in the pro-EU groups reportedly supported von der Leyen, whereas most of ECR and the other groups did not. ECR's lack of support for von der Leyen—and tensions between Meloni and other EU leaders—raises questions about the extent of potential cooperation between ECR, EPP, and other pro-EU groups in the new EP.

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U.S. and Congressional Interests

The 2024 elections could affect EP positions in several areas of U.S.-EU relations of possible interest to Congress, including

• **Trade.** The EP must approve new EU trade agreements, including a potential U.S.-EU critical minerals agreement (aimed at easing U.S.-EU tensions over U.S. clean energy subsidies in P.L. 117-169, commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022).

• **Data Protection and Digital Policies.** The EP has played a central role in shaping the EU's approach to data protection, artificial intelligence, and new digital rules. Some in Congress have expressed concern about the effects of such policies on U.S. companies doing business in Europe.

• **Ukraine and Russia.** The Biden Administration and the EU have cooperated in responding to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The EP must approve certain EU budgetary support measures for Ukraine. In July 2024, the new EP passed a resolution reaffirming support for Ukraine, with 495 MEPs in favor; 137 MEPs—including most of PfE and ESN—voted against the resolution, in part because it also condemned a visit to Russia by Hungarian Prime Minister Orban. Concerns persist in the EP about some parties' traditional ties to Russia and Russia's alleged attempts to influence some MEPs.

• **China.** Similar to some U.S. policymakers, some MEPs are wary about China's rise and concerned with its human rights and labor practices. In 2021, the EP froze work on ratifying an EU-China investment agreement that U.S. officials opposed. Some MEPs also are troubled by China's possible interference operations and alleged cyberattacks.

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