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Chapter 1

Green parties and elections to the European Parliament, 1979–2019

Wolfgang Rüdig

Introduction

The history of green parties in Europe is closely intertwined with the history of elections to the European Parliament. When the first direct elections to the European Parliament took place in June 1979, the development of green parties in Europe was still in its infancy. Only in Belgium and the UK had green parties been formed that took part in these elections; but ecological lists, which were the predecessors of green parties, competed in other countries. Despite not winning representation, the German Greens were particularly influenced by the 1979 European elections. Five years later, most participating countries had seen the formation of national green parties, and the first Green MEPs from Belgium and Germany were elected.

Green parties have been represented continuously in the European Parliament since 1984. Subsequent years saw Greens from many other countries joining their Belgian and German colleagues in the European Parliament. European elections continued to be important for party formation in new EU member countries. In the 1980s it was the South European countries (Greece, Portugal and Spain), following

their successful transition to democracies, that became members. Green parties did not have a strong role in their national party systems, and European elections became an important focus for party development. In the 1990s it was the turn of Austria, Finland and Sweden to join; green parties were already well established in all three nations and provided ongoing support for Greens in the European Parliament. The third major addition came in the 2000s, when East-Central European countries (as well as Malta and Cyprus) took part in European elections for the first time. This provided more of a challenge for the European Greens, who were keen to establish a strong presence in these new member countries. Despite the strong role played by Greens in the transition to democracy of the late 1980s and early 1990s, green parties had faded away in most countries, with the European focus becoming a major element in efforts to revive green politics.

European elections were also of major importance for well-established parties in Western Europe. Green parties have tended to do better in European than in national elections, in many cases benefitting from the unpopularity of national government parties. Thus, European elections often provided a welcome spur to the standing of green parties in national politics. Such a boost was particularly important in countries where the electoral system used in European elections provided Greens with a better opportunity to win representation than in national elections. This, at first, applied especially to France, where a proportional representation system was used from the start (as opposed to the majority voting system used at national elections). France was joined by the UK when the first-past-the-post system employed from 1979 to 1994 was replaced by a proportional representation system in 1999. However, there are also cases of opportunities in European elections being worse than in national elections. This applies to small European countries, who are only allocated a small number of MEPs, meaning that the electoral thresholds for winning representation are higher in European than in national elections. The Netherlands – a country in which European elections majorly influenced the formation of its green parties – is one such case.

Finally, the co-operation of green parties in Europe has also been greatly influenced by European elections and the presence of Green

MEPs. Starting with the first informal attempts to coordinate green efforts in 1979, this partnership eventually led to the formation of the European Green Party (EGP) in 2004. Membership of the EGP became a major aspiration in many countries, particularly new EU member states.

With a five-year cycle of European elections, the last 40 years have seen eight parliamentary sessions, with Greens represented in seven of them. Each election and each parliament has its own distinctive features. The first decade was perhaps the most important for European green politics, with major progress in green party formation being made between the 1979 and 1984 elections. Environmental and peace issues were very high on the political agenda in that decade and provided a strong basis for party growth. The second decade of European Parliaments (1989–99) may be seen as a period of further consolidation. By 1989 the formation of green parties had essentially been completed in most countries throughout Western Europe, although there were some important exceptions (eg France). Most of the green parties that competed in the 1989 European elections still represent green politics in their home countries today. The late 1990s also saw the first entries of green parties into government at a national level (in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany and Italy), which resulted in the 1999 elections being fought by these parties as government rather than opposition parties for the first time, with some but not all experiencing losses. The third decade (1999–2009) saw the entry of new member countries from East-Central Europe. Efforts to boost green parties in these new member states proved difficult, and it was 2014 before the first MEPs from Eastern Europe (from Hungary and Croatia) were elected. The fourth decade (2009–19) brought with it new challenges in the form of a major economic crisis, with several countries facing extremely harsh austerity policies, as well as the rise of right-wing parties with euro-sceptic and anti-immigration policies. Green parties did particularly well in 2009 but less so in 2014. The unpopularity of national governments was a major factor bolstering green votes, particularly in 2009, while green parties that were part of national coalition governments faced more difficult elections.

The overall results of green parties in European elections are documented in the appendix at the end of this chapter. The figures show the strength of green parties in Northern Europe, in the low countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), and in Germany and Austria. In addition, the UK has shown consistent support for the Greens since 1989. The picture is more patchy in Ireland and particularly unstable in France. Southern European countries are also a mixed bag in this respect. The Italian Greens started quite well but have struggled in recent years; Greens in Greece and Portugal have been represented in some parliaments, and consistently in Spain since 2004, but their share of the vote is generally well below that achieved in Northern Europe. Even more difficult is the situation for green parties in East-Central Europe, with only Croatia and Hungary sending Green MEPs to Brussels.

There is a fairly large body of literature on green parties in Europe,¹ which also includes analyses of their performance in European elections.² What are the key contributions that elections to the European Parliament have made to these parties' development? In the rest of this chapter, I will try to highlight some key aspects that have helped, or hindered, the development of green parties in Europe.

Helping the establishment of green parties, 1979–89

The introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 could not have come at a better time for green parties. The 1970s had seen the emergence of strong environmental and anti-nuclear (energy) movements through much of Western Europe. Limited opportunities to influence governments, particularly on the nuclear issue, had been a major impetus for these movements to enter the electoral arena. In countries where the anti-nuclear movement had provided the main focus, such as France and Germany, there was a strong reluctance to embrace what was seen as joining the establishment by forming a political party. In France, ad hoc electoral lists had formed to take part in parliamentary and presidential elections beginning in 1974. In

Germany, electoral and party law made the formation of a political party a virtual necessity. With various parties and lists having taken part in local and regional elections since 1977, the 1979 European elections provided an opportunity to take a step towards an intermediate form of organisation: unlike in federal elections, so-called other political organisations not constituted as parties were allowed to participate at a national level. This provided Petra Kelly and others with the chance to bring together a wide range of groups to join the 'Other Political Organisation: The Greens' and participate in the European elections of June 1979. This predecessor of the modern-day Greens, which was formally constituted as a party in January 1980, failed to win any seats in the European Parliament but gained an unexpected bonus via the generous German system of funding political parties based on electoral results. Polling 3.2% of the vote qualified this new political force to receive public funding of 4.8 million Deutschmarks. This financial windfall allowed the new party to be set up very quickly, with a national office and permanent staff. Two-thirds of the funds were passed on to regional parties, which further boosted the party's fortunes with a series of successes in land (state) elections.³ These initial election successes at regional level were quickly followed by a breakthrough in the 1983 federal elections.

Objections to the idea of a green 'party' were much stronger in France, which meant the formation process took significantly longer there. The electoral system introduced for European elections in France was a proportional representation system with a national 5% threshold. This provided small parties with a much better chance of gaining representation than the system for national and subnational elections. The 1979 European elections followed the pattern of previous elections, with a list called Europe Ecology – which was set up specifically for the elections – taking part. Garnering 4.4% of the vote, Europe Ecology narrowly missed the 5% threshold, but the potential for a successful green party had been established. The candidacy of Brice Lalonde in the 1981 presidential elections gave the Greens a further boost. Disappointment over what was seen by many as a betrayal of the Greens by new socialist president François Mitterrand led to a greater effort to organise electoral participation.

The 1984 European elections provided yet another major incentive. Various ecological groups agreed to form a party called The Greens in January 1984 to present a united front in the European elections. However, unity was not achieved: former presidential candidate Brice Lalonde failed to join The Greens and decided to field his own list. The green vote in the 1984 elections was thus split. A united green list would have passed the 5% threshold comfortably with 6.7%, but each separate party fell short. This lack of unity and splits between different groups plagued the French Greens for many years afterwards.

In Belgium, the Flemish Greens – known as Agalev – had emerged mainly from a left–Catholic movement with counter-cultural elements, which had been campaigning on environmental, peace and social justice issues since 1970. It started taking part in elections in 1977. Polling 2.3% in Flanders in 1979 established Agalev as the main green group in the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium. Greens in the French-speaking part of the country – Ecolo – initially struggled with competing groups, but the 1979 European elections provided an opportunity to unite all ecologist groups in Wallonia under the Ecolo heading, with the party polling 5.1%.⁴ Following their participation in the 1979 elections, both parties entered the Belgian Federal Parliament in 1981 and grew steadily in the 1980s and 1990s.

In the UK, questions of party unity and links to social movements were not a major issue. The party had been formally set up as People in 1973: the first green party in Europe. After changing its name to The Ecology Party in 1975, it made its first major breakthrough in the 1979 general election, which took place just before the European elections in May. Having managed to field more than 50 candidates in order to qualify for the right to a ‘party political broadcast’, The Ecology Party succeeded in drawing wider public attention to its existence in the election campaign, and membership rose dramatically from fewer than 1,000 in 1978 to more than 5,000 in 1980. Unlike in Germany and France, the European elections did not provide a special opportunity to win representation. The financial cost of taking part in the elections was very high, with deposits to be paid by each candidate and no system of public funding for political

parties in place, and the electoral system was extremely unfavourable. Contrary to the French model, the British system for European elections mirrored the system used for national elections, and MEPs in the UK were elected via the first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies. This rendered the possibility of winning any seats a fairly remote one. The Ecology Party made barely a token effort to take part and contested just three out of 87 constituencies, winning the support of an average of 1% of voters. By 1984 the party was contesting 26 constituencies and achieving an average share of 2.6% of the vote: a small but significant improvement.

While there were relatively minor problems with recognising the ecological and green lists and parties in the UK, Belgium, France and Germany as genuine members of what was emerging as a new 'green party' family, such consolidation was more difficult for other parties in Europe. Even within these parties, there were different concepts as to what constituted a 'green' party. Some emphasised a strictly ecological identity, as was the dominant view in Belgium, France and the UK. Others, particularly the German Greens, favoured what might be called a left-libertarian view of green politics,⁵ representing the broader new social movements and New Left politics that had emerged with the rise of the student movement in the 1960s.

Various New Left parties had managed to establish themselves in countries such as the Netherlands, Italy and Denmark well before the Greens had appeared on the scene and embraced an environmental and anti-nuclear agenda. When the fledgling green movement looked for possible partners for the 1979 European elections, the Dutch and Italian parties expressed their interest and became part of the first attempt to set up a European organisation to coordinate the development of green and 'alternative'/radical parties in Europe.⁶

In Italy, the Radical Party (originally formed in 1955) had in the 1970s campaigned on various left-libertarian issues, but it had also taken an active role in opposition to nuclear power. Under the charismatic leadership of Marco Pannella, the Radical Party had its best electoral result in the Italian general election of 1979, held just one week before the European elections, when it polled 3.5% and won 18 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The party

did slightly better in the European elections, polling 3.7% to elect three MEPs.

In the Netherlands, the Radical Party (or Political Party of Radicals, PPR) was formed in 1968 by a group of activists with a left-wing Catholic background. The party campaigned on left-libertarian, environmental and peace issues. As the Dutch electoral system makes it fairly easy for small parties to gain representation, with an effective threshold of just 0.67%, the PPR had no serious problems being elected to the Dutch Parliament: by the 1970s it had joined a centre-left government as a coalition partner. European elections provided more of a challenge. With only 25 seats in the European Parliament, parties had to win at least 4% of the vote to have a chance of gaining representation. The PPR only polled 1.7% in the 1979 European elections and thus fell far short of that target, as did other small left-wing parties such as the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP).

Both the Italian and Dutch Radicals joined the Coordination of European Green and Radical Parties that was set up after the 1979 elections. However, the involvement of radical parties proved difficult. The Italian Radicals displayed little interest in building up any formal structure, preferring instead to concentrate on campaigns for individual issues. Their involvement proved to be short lived, and the party did not become a predecessor of green parties in Italy. In the Dutch case, the development was somewhat different. The idea of several left-wing parties co-operating had been discussed already in the 1970s, and the conditions for contesting European elections provided a further incentive. The political project that took shape in the run-up to the 1984 European elections was an electoral alliance between the PPR and two other small left-wing parties – the PSP mentioned above and the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) – called the Green Progressive Accord (GPA). This was highly controversial; a rival party called The Greens was set up to compete with the GPA in the 1984 European elections (as the European Greens). Internationally, while the German Greens supported the GPA, other green parties favoured The Greens. However, The Greens only polled 1.3% and failed to win any seats, while the GPA won 5.6% of the vote, electing two MEPs. The split between the two

parties was never resolved; the GPA became the predecessor of the GreenLeft party that was eventually founded in 1990 and accepted as a genuine Dutch green party.

Another case in which the presence of left–libertarian parties provided an obstacle to the development of green parties was Denmark. Here, several established parties – in particular the Left Socialists (VS), who had led the Danish anti-nuclear movement, and the Socialist People’s Party (SP) – competed for green votes. A separate green party was formed in 1983 but failed to win enough support even to appear on the ballot paper.⁷ The Greens never managed to take part in any European elections. Eventually, following a path similar to that of GreenLeft, the SP became part of the European green party family in the late 2000s. A number of other green parties had formed in the early 1980s in Sweden, the Republic of Ireland, Portugal and Spain. The 1984 European elections (including the 1987 elections taking place in the new member states of Portugal and Spain) saw green parties competing in eight out of 11 member states as well as the election of the first Green MEPs in Belgium and Germany, plus two MEPs from the GPA in the Netherlands.

Given the failure to integrate radical parties and the strong controversy regarding the situation in the Netherlands, the majority of green parties originally wanted to move ahead with a European organisation limited to green parties on a more exclusive basis. The founding members of the European Green Coordination in 1983 came from Belgium, France, the UK, the Republic of Ireland and Sweden: the German Greens were not included. However, the relative weakness of these parties, and the wish to include the German Greens – who continued to support the idea of including alternative and radical parties – eventually led to the need to form technical alliances. Within the European Parliament, green party MEPs became part of the Rainbow Group that includes MEPs from regional parties and anti-EU Danish MEPs. The Green–Alternative Europe Link (GRAEL) was set up as a subgroup: this included Belgian and German Green MEPs as well as MEPs from the Dutch GPA. As the 1980s progressed, the intensity of the conflict surrounding the

GPA finally receded, and the German Greens were admitted into the Coordination in 1987.

Growth and consolidation, 1989–99

The political conditions for green parties in the 1980s continued to be favourable. Following the boost that the peace movement of the early 1980s had provided to many green parties, the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986 led to a revival of anti-nuclear protests in many Western European countries. The rise of global environmental issues – the threat of a hole in the ozone layer, detected in 1985, followed by increasing concerns about climate change – created a political agenda on which the environment was placed very highly, often for the first time. The 1989 European elections in many countries were thus predominantly fought on environmental issues, and green parties made further strides forward.

Green parties contested elections in ten out of 11 member states, with Denmark being the only country with no green party on the ballot paper. Among the three countries with green representation in the European Parliament in 1984, the Greens did particularly well in Belgium. The German Greens only narrowly improved on their result. In the Netherlands, the electoral alliance of left-wing parties again competed, this time under the label ‘Rainbow’, and marginally increased its support.

The big success stories were the UK and France. In the UK, the Green Party had the resources to use the European elections as an opportunity to raise its profile. For the first time, it was competing in all constituencies in the hope that a strong showing would help in national elections. The situation was extremely favourable for the Greens. Environmental issues had for the first time become very important, not least due to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s efforts to highlight the threat of climate change in 1988. Saturation media coverage of environmental issues, also the result of a series of environmental scandals following the privatisation of the water industry in England and Wales, contributed to this heightened public attention.

The Greens also benefitted from the crisis of the Liberal party, which had traditionally been the main establishment party campaigning on environmental issues. After the merger of the Liberals with the less environmentally friendly Social Democratic Party in 1988, the new Liberal Democrats party had not succeeded in establishing its identity. The Greens managed to win support from across the political spectrum, including from former Conservative supporters, and polled 14.5% in the UK. At the time, this was the highest share of the vote ever achieved by a green party in an election at the national level. However, despite this unprecedented electoral success, the first-past-the-post system meant that not a single Green MEP was elected. And while the party experienced a major surge in membership, it was unable to translate that into a breakthrough in the UK general election.⁸

In France, the Greens had finally overcome their divisions – at least temporarily – and presented only one green list in the European elections. With 10.6% of the vote and nine MEPs elected, the French Greens also had high hopes of translating their result into success at the national level. As concerns over nuclear power and climate change were less salient in France, it was increased disillusionment with the Socialist government that provided the major spur for the Greens. With Socialist voters seeking to send a message to President Mitterrand but reluctant to vote for a party on the right, the Greens were in a perfect position to win over Socialist protest voters. However, as in the UK, hopes of a European success being the starting point for a breakthrough at the national level were disappointed. With all green groups joining forces in the legislative elections of 1993, the opinion polls were at first extremely promising, raising Greens' hopes of winning representation in the National Assembly and potentially exerting influence on government formation. However, the bipolar French system provided a major obstacle to this. By presenting itself as neither a left- nor a right-wing party, the Greens suffered the same fate as many other efforts to overcome the left-right divide in the Fifth Republic; despite polling a record 7% in the first round, the Greens did not win a single seat.

The issue of competition from rival green parties and lists also plagued green politics in several other countries. In Italy, a number

of local and regional green parties had been emerging since the early 1980s. The formation of a national party proved to be rather difficult. The Federation of Greens Lists was formed in 1986 and won seats in the Italian Chamber of Deputies in 1987. Shortly before the 1989 European elections, the Rainbow Greens was formed, mainly by former members of the Radicals and other left-wing parties. Both the Federation and the Rainbow Greens competed with each other. Given the Italian proportional representation system's very low effective threshold, both parties managed to elect MEPs with 3.8% and 2.4% of the vote, respectively. They soon afterwards merged to form the Federation of the Greens in 1990. However, any hopes for a major boost to the party have since been dashed, as the 1989 result (in terms of vote share) remains to this day the best achieved by Italian green parties in any national election.

Green parties also competed in the elections of other South European countries. In Greece, several small parties took part but did not come close to winning representation. The situation in Spain continued to be particularly complex, with a number of regional and national formations competing against one other. In Portugal, the Green Party continued to compete in elections as part of an electoral alliance with the Communist Party, and in 1989 had one MEP elected. This would prove to be the first and only occasion on which the Portuguese Greens were represented in the European Parliament.

While the potential green vote that could be mobilised in poorer South European countries was fairly low, the situation was completely different in the EU's most affluent member state: Luxembourg. Here, an alternative list had competed in the 1979 election and that contributed to the formation of the Green Alternative Party (GAP) in 1983, which almost immediately won two seats in the national parliament and also competed in the European elections, winning a creditable 6.1% of the votes. As Luxembourg (being a small country) only sent six MEPs to Brussels, this was not sufficient to win representation. Also, fractures emerged within the party, similar to those experienced in the Dutch case, between a left-wing faction and a rival group committed to a more ecological identity. This led to the formation of a new green party, the Green List Ecological

Initiative (GLEI), and both parties competed with each other in the 1989 European elections. While both had enough support to win representation in that year's national parliamentary election, neither party had an MEP elected. It was only once this split was overcome in the 1990s that the Luxembourg Greens started to be represented in the European Parliament as well.⁹

The 1989 elections were a major breakthrough for the Greens, who saw 28 MEPs elected that year. At a European level, the Greens were now strong enough to form their own parliamentary group, The Green Group, in the European Parliament; this had 31 members after two MEPs from small Italian parties and one Basque MEP were also admitted. In 1993, the European Federation of Green Parties was formed to improve the co-operation of green parties in Europe. Being admitted as a member of the Federation in subsequent years became an important stepping stone for aspiring green parties wanting to be recognised as genuine members of the green party family.

Based on a strong performance in the 1989 elections, there were high hopes that further progress would be made in the 1990s. The 1994 elections saw some successes, but these were marred by serious setbacks. The general context was slightly less favourable. Economic conditions had worsened in many countries in the early 1990s, and the saliency of environmental issues had faded somewhat since 1989. Also, setbacks at the national level had knock-on effects for European results. These particularly affected results in the UK and France, the big winners of 1989. The disappointed ambition of making a breakthrough in the national elections of 1992 and 1993, respectively, had deflated green enthusiasm. The French Greens were again facing the problem of rival lists competing. In a repeat of ten years earlier, the Greens were being challenged by a rival green party led by Brice Lalonde. Together, the parties managed to get 5%, but separately they ended up with no seats. The German Greens had their own national disaster in the first election of a newly unified Germany in 1990, when they failed to win any seats in West Germany. An all-German green party, called Alliance '90/The Greens, was formed in 1993, and the 1994 European elections constituted its first national electoral test. The Greens did very well, gaining 10.1%

of the vote: a clear sign that German voters were willing to support the new party, which a few months later entered the *Bundestag* again.

Other countries previously plagued by rivalries that showed signs of recovery were the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Dutch left-wing parties that had formed electoral alliances in 1984 and 1989 finally agreed to merge into a new party, GreenLeft, in 1990. They comfortably won representation again, despite continued competition from the Greens, who again failed to make an impact. In Luxembourg, the split that emerged in 1984 had been healed, with both parties forming a joint list and electing their first Green MEP. Otherwise, the Irish Greens were the main newcomer, electing two MEPs for the first time.

A further boost to the Greens' fortunes was expected from green parties in Northern Europe, where Sweden and Finland had joined the EU together with Austria. Sweden and Finland had well-established green parties, and there had not been the divisions and splits experienced in other countries here. The Austrian Greens had gone through a period of rival lists in the 1980s, but this had been overcome. In elections taking place between 1995 and 1996, all three parties were successful in electing Green MEPs, with the Swedish result standing out as a new record: 17.2%. The Swedish Greens had mainly campaigned on an anti-EU platform and had attracted many anti-establishment voters protesting against the main parties of both the left and right that had brought Sweden into the EU. The Swedes' success was welcome, but it injected a stronger euro-sceptic note into the European Greens, opening up a major divide between enthusiastic pro-EU parties and those more sceptical about further European integration, such as the Danish and, to a lesser extent, the British Greens.¹⁰

The overall aim of the 1994 elections, despite taking place under more difficult circumstances, was to confirm the advances made in 1989. This was undoubtedly achieved. Greens by the mid-1990s had successfully established themselves in many party systems. As a result, green parties were soon increasingly considered as coalition partners in government. Starting with the Finnish Greens in 1995, green parties were to enter government in several major Western European countries, and the 1999 European elections were to be the

first in which many green parties would fight as government rather than opposition parties.

Facing new challenges: government and East-Central Europe, 1999–2009

One explanation for the success green parties have been enjoying in European elections is the theory of ‘second-order’ elections.¹¹ As no government is elected in European elections and most voters do not expect the outcome to affect their lives, the elections could be viewed as a popularity contest. This would make it more likely that government parties would suffer losses, and voters might be more willing than in national parliamentary elections to cast their votes for smaller parties. As turnout is generally lower in European than in national elections, dedicated supporters of small parties might make more of an impact in this forum. The Greens could be seen as having benefitted from these conditions, attracting many voters who might otherwise have shunned giving their support to new and small parties in national elections.

With green parties becoming established and joining government coalitions at a national level in Finland, Italy, France, Germany and Belgium in the late 1990s,¹² the conditions for some green parties changed, making it more difficult for them to benefit from the second-order nature of European elections. The first test under these new conditions was faced by the Finnish Greens, who had entered national government in 1995 after polling 6.5% in the national election; the party improved on this result in the next European elections in Finland (1996), garnering 7.6% of the vote. The Finnish Greens continued their role in government after 1999 and, again, the party improved on its national parliamentary election result of 7.3%, achieved in March 1999, with a record result of 13.4% in the European election of June 1999. At least for the Finnish Greens, the theory of second-order elections does not seem to apply. Here, the Greens appear to have benefitted from the popularity of their lead candidate as well as misgivings about

the record of the Greens' coalition partners.¹³ In 2002, the Finnish Greens decided to leave the government after losing a parliamentary vote on the construction of a new nuclear power station. The 2004 European elections thus provided a test of whether the electorate approved of that decision – with 10.4% of the vote, the Greens did creditably well.

The second party to enter a national coalition government was the Italian Greens in 1996, as part of the left-wing Olive Tree coalition. Following a change in the electoral system in the early 1990s that limited the role of proportional representation, the Italian party system saw a right- and a left-wing bloc compete for power: the Greens became part of the latter. Their participation in government was, however, quite controversial. In particular, the party's support of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) action in Kosovo proved unpopular and led to the Greens only polling 1.3% in the 1999 European elections. The Greens' role in government came to an end in 2001, and their performance as an opposition party in the 2004 European elections did not constitute a major improvement, earning them just 2.5% of the vote.

The third green party to join the government was the French Greens. After a disappointing result in the 1993 legislative elections, there was a debate in the party over whether to abandon the policy of not becoming involved with either the right- or left-wing blocs that were competing for power. In 1995, the majority of members opted to seek an electoral alliance with the Socialist Party. Weakened by the legacy of the Mitterrand presidency, the Socialists agreed to form the so-called Plural Left, a partial electoral alliance of centre-left parties. The Plural Left won the legislative elections of 1997, and the Greens found themselves with not only representation in the National Assembly for the first time, but also an invitation straight into government. With the proportional electoral system used for European elections, the Greens could run on their own in 1999; they found the electorate appreciative of their decision, winning 9.7% of the vote and electing seven MEPs. After the Socialists lost the 2002 presidential and legislative elections, the Greens returned to opposition and polled 7.2% in the 2004 European elections.

So far, we have seen two cases in which green parties did quite well after entering government, and one in which the Greens fared less well. The two cases to which we now turn, Germany and Belgium, provide further contrasting experiences. The German Greens entered a coalition government with the Social Democrats in 1998. The party was caught in strong conflicts with its coalition partner; in particular, plans to phase out nuclear power and the decision for Germany to become involved in NATO action against Serbia were very controversial, causing severe frictions within the party. As a result, the German Greens lost voters in every election they stood for between 1998 and 2002. The 1999 result was a case in point, which saw them polling their worst result since 1979 (6.4%). After being re-elected in 2002, the Greens' fortunes improved. All major controversies had been resolved by then, and the green electorate appeared to support this less adversarial approach. The German Greens recovered to achieve a new record result, 11.9%, in 2004.

The Belgian Greens had the reverse experience. In the 1999 European elections they still fought as an opposition party, benefiting from various environmental scandals and cases of government incompetence to poll a record 16%. The federal elections were held on the same day, and with Agalev polling 11% and Ecolo 18.2%, the two green parties formed a coalition with the liberal and socialist parties. The experience of government was, however, less than positive. A combination of ministerial incompetence and divisions between the two green parties led to electoral disaster in 2003, with both parties suffering major losses and Agalev failing to win representation for the first time since 1981. The 2004 elections thus provided an indication of the extent to which both parties had recovered: the Greens had lost almost half of their voters from 1999 but still returned two MEPs with 8.7%.

Green parties without a background in government also had some mixed experiences. The GreenLeft in the Netherlands achieved its best ever result (11.9%), credited in part to the charismatic leadership of Paul Rosenmöller. The Austrian Greens improved their result, while the Greens in Luxembourg maintained their position. The Swedish Greens could not repeat their sensational

performance of 1994, but they still achieved a creditable result of just below 10%.

There was one important change in the UK that added to the number of Green MEPs elected. Following the election of a Labour government in 1997, the electoral law for European elections was changed to bring in a form of proportional representation. The country was divided into 12 regions, nine in England plus Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The change did not affect Northern Ireland, which continued to elect MEPs by single transferable vote (STV). Proportionality was applied within each region, rather than nationally. The size of the constituencies – particularly in Southern England, where Greens could expect to do particularly well (with 11 and 10 seats available in the South East and London, respectively) – gave Greens the chance to have their first MEPs elected. Polling 7.7% in London and 7.4% in the South East was sufficient to elect the first two MEPs from the UK: Caroline Lucas and Jean Lambert.¹⁴ The Green Party of England and Wales was represented continuously between 1999 and 2019.

Overall, 1999 was a good year for the Greens, with 38 MEPs elected: a new record. In the European Parliament, there was a change of organisation; this saw the Greens joining forces with the European Free Alliance (EFA), which consisted mainly of regional parties. The Greens–EFA mustered 48 MEPs and thus became the fourth largest group in the European Parliament. At the party level, the European Federation was replaced by the EGP in 2004.

Such a shift was timely and helped prepare the Greens for a major change to the shape of European politics: this came in the form of 12 new countries joining the EU, who took part in European elections for the first time in 2004 (2007 for Bulgaria and Romania). This proved to be a significant challenge for the Greens. The record of green parties in East-Central Europe had been quite promising during the transition phase from communism to liberal democracy. Green parties had been formed in several countries and in many had played an important role in their first democratically elected governments.¹⁵ After these transitions were completed, however, most green parties disappeared rapidly from the political scene. The severe

economic hardship experienced by Eastern Europe in the 1990s was a large contributor to this, changing the agenda completely and pushing environmental concerns into the background. In most countries, green parties had vanished as serious political contenders by the time of the EU accession in the early 2000s.

For Western green parties, who had welcomed the EU's enlargement with open arms, the prospect of finding partners in Eastern Europe in the early 2000s proved a daunting prospect. What remained of the green movements and parties of the transition phase was generally very weak but still sometimes regarded as politically problematical. Green activists of the 1980s often had backgrounds in the natural sciences and engineering, and their expertise in environmental matters was an important element of their success; however, this profile led them to appear as mere 'environmentalists' and unpolitical in Western eyes. Also, the green parties of Eastern Europe often did not share the libertarian–left agenda of Western green parties. Many were strongly in favour of the free market and embraced a neoliberal economic agenda. In some countries, environmental politics had become closely linked with nationalist movements and agendas. This jarred with the multicultural approach of Western Greens, in which the protection of minority rights plays a very important role. In other cases, green parties teamed up with communist successor parties, or were deemed to have become vehicles for the interests of 'oligarchs' or other established interests.

One of the green survivors of the transition phase were the Latvian Greens.¹⁶ Their record was quite impressive, having maintained a role in government for many years (1993–8 and 2002–11). They were also the first green party to hold the post of prime minister: Indulis Emsis was head of an interim government from March to December 2004. In 1998 the Greens joined with the Latvian Farmers' Union to form the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS). After the ZZS had polled 9.5% in the 2002 national parliamentary elections, receiving a share of 4.3% in the European elections at the time of Emsis's premiership was rather disappointing. The ZZS failed to win representation. Other green parties that were founded during the transition phase still existed in Bulgaria and Romania, but with

support below 1%, their role in European elections (held in 2007) remained very marginal.

The European Greens were more hopeful about green parties in Poland and the Czech Republic.¹⁷ In Poland, a number of parties claiming to be green had existed in the early 1990s, but they had long since faded away. Environmental activists associated with the Solidarity movement became involved with the Freedom Union, which was in government in the 1990s before losing representation. With the support of the European Greens, a new party called Greens 2004 was formed in September 2003 to take part in the 2004 European elections. Greens 2004 also involved feminist activists; it was thus not narrowly environmental in its views, but displayed features akin to those found in post-materialist Western European green parties. The 2004 European elections proved to be a difficult beginning for the new party: it only managed to field candidates in three of the 13 European constituencies (Warsaw, Silesia and Lower Silesia), and its national result of just 0.27% was an obvious disappointment. The Greens persevered but ultimately failed to make an impact at local or parliamentary elections.

A green party existed in the Czech Republic in the early 1990s but had become discredited by claims of having links with the old communist regime. The Greens were revived just in time for the 2004 European elections by a range of environmental nongovernmental organisation (NGO) activists and intellectuals. While this relaunch brought the Greens back from complete obscurity, their 2004 European election result of 3.2% was disappointing. However, the party entered the national parliament in 2006 to join the Czech government as a coalition partner.

In other new member states, green parties participated in the elections as part of electoral alliances in Slovakia and Slovenia but failed to make a major impact. Greens in the Mediterranean states of Cyprus and Malta also failed to elect any MEPs. The Cyprus Greens were fairly small, polling less than 1%. The green party in Malta, the Alternative Democrats, formed in 1989 but had found it difficult to undercut the dominance of the two major parties, Labour and the Nationalist Party. Having polled between 1% and 2% in national elections, their

2004 result of 9.3% was a huge success for the party, although it was not sufficient for an MEP to be elected. A major factor in this outcome was the popularity of party leader Arnold Cassola, who had been very prominent in the campaign for EU membership.¹⁸

Another success in Southern Europe was the first election of Green MEPs from Spain: in both cases, green parties had formed joint lists with larger parties. The Confederation of the Greens formed an alliance with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and had one MEP elected. The Catalan ICV stood in an electoral alliance with the United Left (IU) and also had one MEP elected.

Overall, the 2004 European elections were a success for the Greens. These were the largest European elections thus far, involving 25 countries (with Bulgaria and Romania added in 2007). The Greens generally weathered this period of government involvement well, and the first MEPs were elected in Spain and the UK. However, the elections also revealed the problems being faced by those attempting to establish successful green parties in East-Central Europe.

Austerity and populism, 2009–19

The global financial crisis that emerged in 2008 had a profound effect on the politics of the following decade, with policies of economic austerity becoming dominant in many European countries. It was a struggle for environmental issues to stay visible in this context. The 2010s also saw the rise of populist right-wing parties campaigning on immigration issues and opposition to the EU as well as promoting scepticism about climate change and rolling back environmental regulation. Austerity and the emergence of the extreme right provided the major challenges to green politics during this time.

At the time of the 2009 European elections, the full nature of the crisis and its resultant policies of austerity were yet to unfold fully, but the elections were nonetheless dominated by the threat of serious economic and social problems. A further complication was that green parties in several countries had joined national coalition governments, and – unlike in the 1990s – often with centre-right coalition partners.

This placed some green parties in positions of accountability with regard to the economic crisis and its ensuing austerity measures.

An early sign of problems for green parties associated with the economic crisis was the result in the Republic of Ireland. The Greens had entered a government coalition with the conservative Fianna Fáil party in 2007.¹⁹ The Republic of Ireland was hit very hard by the financial crisis, and severe measures including radical austerity policies were taken in 2008. While no direct responsibility for the financial crisis could possibly be attributed to the Greens, the party got caught up in public outrage over the policies adopted. The 2009 European elections were thus fought under a cloud of austerity. The party only fought two of the four constituencies and polled just 1.9%, losing representation in the European Parliament. Dramatic losses were also experienced in local elections on the same day. The Greens carried on in government until 2011, when they lost all representation in the Irish Parliament.

Another case where a green party in government was negatively affected by the economic crisis is Latvia. The country was very badly affected by the global economic crisis and adopted radical austerity policies. The 2009 European elections were a first electoral test for the government after the crisis. Shortly before the European elections, in March 2009 the government collapsed. The Greens did not play a role in this collapse, but in the prevailing economic climate it was more difficult for the party to gain a hearing for ecological issues. The ZZS polled just 3.7% and again failed to earn enough votes to win representation.

A further case of government participation having a negative effect on electoral performance is the Czech Republic. Here, the Greens had entered a national coalition government in 2006 under a new leader, Martin Bursík. He won the leadership in 2005 despite resistance from the group of environmental activists who had successfully relaunched the party in the early 2000s. Bursík had been a member of other parties before and was seen as a charismatic leader with the media experience to promote the party more effectively. The Greens entered the Czech Parliament for the first time in 2006 with 6.2% of the vote and formed a coalition with two conservative

parties, but internal opposition to government participation became a major problem. Alongside concern over the neoliberal economic policies pursued by the government, opposition to Bursík's leadership tore the party apart. After two Green MPs were expelled from the party, the coalition collapsed in March 2009. Two rival parties were formed to compete with the Greens in the European elections of June 2009, but none of them came close to winning representation: the Greens only polled 2.1%, and did little better in the national elections of 2010.²⁰ The experience of participation in government on this occasion proved to have a negative effect on the party's development.

Looking at other cases of green parties entering the 2009 elections following a period in national office, the Italian Greens had entered government again in 2006 as part of another broad centre-left electoral alliance called The Union. However, that government was very unstable and had collapsed by 2008. In the subsequent parliamentary election, the Greens were excluded from the main left-wing alliance and had to join a group dominated by two communist parties (the Rainbow Left), but they failed to re-enter parliament. The Greens thus entered the 2009 European elections from a position of weakness: this had little to do with the work they had done in government but was a result of the division of the Italian left and its failure to create a viable alternative to the right. In 2009 the Greens joined an alliance of New Left parties called Left Ecology Freedom. Gaining 3.1% of the vote, the list failed to win the 4% necessary to guarantee representation.

A contrary example to these cases of governments having an adverse effect on electoral performance is provided by Finland. The Finnish Greens had re-entered government in 2007 in a coalition led by right-wing parties. The European election of 2009 was the first electoral test of the new government. Fielding two very strong candidates (Heidi Hautala and Satu Hassi), who had played a leading role in Finnish green politics, the Greens did very well, with a result of 12.4% electing two MEPs. Environmental issues played some role in the party's campaign and, as before, green voters were obviously not put off by the Greens' participation in government, even with conservative parties.

Looking at other countries, the pattern of previous years was essentially repeated in this period. In general, the green parties of East-Central Europe did not do particularly well, while the green parties of more affluent Northern Europe maintained their strong position. In Southern Europe, the share of the vote was, again, fairly low, but the Greek Greens had some success. Following devastating forest fires in 2007 and a wave of riots directed against the political establishment in 2008, the Greens briefly became a force to be reckoned with, and the first Greek Green MEP was elected with 3.5% of the vote.²¹

The one outstanding result of 2009 was achieved in France, which elected 14 Green MPs with 16.3% of the vote. This French case has some unusual features. The success had been achieved by a list called Europe Ecology,²² which was the brainchild of Daniel Cohn-Bendit. After achieving fame as the leader of the 1968 student movement in Paris, he was forced to leave France and came to play an important role in the German Green party. After steering the French Greens to their 1999 European election success, Cohn-Bendit became leader of the Green parliamentary group in the European Parliament. He was re-elected in 2004 on the list of the German Greens but expressed his interest in returning to the French political scene in early 2008. At that time, the French Greens faced a major internal crisis, mainly stemming from renewed discussions about its relationship with the Socialist Party. In opposition since 2002, the Greens had refused to enter a new electoral alliance with the Socialists in the 2007 legislative elections, and there was concern that the party was turning into a more 'fundamentalist' force. Cohn-Bendit had been a close ally of the German Greens' long-time 'virtual' leader, Joschka Fischer, and shared Fischer's reformist vision of green politics as the art of the possible; this put him at odds with the French Greens' new fundamentalist tendencies.

To help renew the French Greens, Cohn-Bendit's vision was to include people from outside of the green party, from civil society and other political movements. He managed to recruit prominent activists from civil rights and anti-globalisation movements, such as Eva Joly and José Bové, to a new movement called Ecology Europe. Politically, Cohn-Bendit sought to create a more centrist force, unburdened by

the chronic divisions typical of far-left groups in France. However, Cohn-Bendit's initiative also included a threat to basic elements of green politics, such as grassroots democracy and the power of party activists to determine the party's development. In fact, Cohn-Bendit's vision featured major elements of an 'anti-party' attitude; he expected the Greens to eventually disband and be replaced by some kind of 'green collective'. However, given their weakness in previous years as well as Cohn-Bendit's charismatic personality and the outstanding role he had played in green politics over many decades, the Greens decided to go along with his initiative nevertheless. An agreement was reached by the Greens and Europe Ecology to run under the latter's name, but with half of all candidates being selected by the Greens and the other half being nominated by Europe Ecology, which included prominent recruits that Cohn-Bendit had collected from civic groups outside of green politics. The experiment worked: Europe Ecology was tremendously successful.

The case of Europe Ecology is a prominent example of European elections being used for what might be termed political experiments. Some critics saw this initiative as introducing a kind of green 'celebrity' politics, with democratic internal procedures being replaced by the choice of a charismatic leader. The effect of the 2009 'experiment' on the post-election phase was, however, less profound. The process of selecting candidates from civic society groups continued for the regional elections of 2010 but was then abandoned. Both groups joined to form a new party, Europe Ecology–The Greens (EELV), in 2010, and Cohn-Bendit withdrew from participation in 2011. The idea of having a nonparty structure in green politics seems to have been just an episode.

In the 2014 elections, the European crisis and austerity politics dominated the agenda. While the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011 had contributed to a temporary electoral boom for green parties (particularly in Germany), by the time of the European elections environmental issues were marginalised. The Greens only won 38 seats in 2014, compared with 47 in 2009. Nevertheless, given the very unfavourable context, this election result can still be seen as a success.

The results again combined successes with some disappointments. The French victories of 2009 could not be repeated. In 2012, the French Greens had rejoined the Socialists in government, but they became more and more disillusioned with the increasingly right-wing nature of the government's policies and their own lack of influence. The Greens eventually left government again in 2014, shortly before the European election, in an attempt to distance themselves from the increasingly unpopular Socialists. On this occasion, the Greens could not even benefit from the charismatic leadership of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had retired from active politics. Given all of this, their result of 9% can be regarded as a respectable one.

Other countries with Greens in government at the time of the elections included Denmark, Finland, Latvia and Luxembourg. The Finnish Green League had previously done well in European elections, despite their long involvement in government, but this time the party suffered some losses. Continuously in government since 2007, the party had decided to stay, in spite of government decisions on nuclear power going against them. Austerity policies also played a role. The Left Alliance had departed government in protest against these policies, but the Greens had decided to stay. While the Left Alliance increased their share of the vote, the Green League experienced some slight losses.

The Danish Socialist People's Party (SF) had observer status with the EGP but decided before the election to apply for full membership. A few months before the elections, it had also decided to leave its government coalition over disagreements on what the party regarded as neoliberal policies pursued by the Social Democrats. With 11% of the vote, the SF lost almost 5 percentage points compared with its 2000 result.

In Luxembourg, the Greens had entered national government for the first time in 2013 as part of a coalition with Liberals and Social Democrats. All government parties lost votes, but green losses were fairly minor: they gained 15% of the vote (compared with 16.8% in 2009).

In Latvia, the Greens found themselves in government at the time of the elections after a brief period in opposition (2011–14).

The result of the Union of Greens and Farmers was again lower than in national elections but higher than in the previous European elections. One MEP was elected, but they were a representative of the Latvian Farmers' Union. Later in the year, the Union of Greens and Farmers polled 19.5% in the country's parliamentary elections. In 2015, Raimonds Vējonis was elected president of Latvia; this is the first time a green party member has held the post of head of state.

Another case where green government involvement played a role, this time at a regional level, was Belgium. Here, the Greens were, overall, slightly down on the 2009 result, but there was a major difference between the two green parties. While the Flemish Greens improved in their representation, polling 6.7% in Flanders (compared with 4.9% in 2009), Ecolo lost half of its 2009 votes, dropping from 8.6% to 4.3%. While the Flemish Greens had not been in government at the regional level, Ecolo appears to have been punished for its government involvement, losing voters mainly to a far-left party: the Workers' Party of Belgium.

Among green parties that did not have to defend a record in government, the picture was rather mixed. Greens in Germany and the Netherlands experienced slight losses. More serious losses were experienced in Greece, where the Greens only polled 0.9% and lost their MEP. Severe austerity policies had made it difficult for the party to make its mark. Italy was not a success story in 2014 either. Monica Frassoni, co-chair of the EGP, founded the movement Green Italia, which sought to unite people from a variety of political backgrounds, from left to right, as well as movement activists, green economic entrepreneurs and intellectuals. Green Italia and Italy's green party, the Federation of the Greens, entered the European elections on a joint list but attracted only 0.9% of the overall vote and secured no MEPs.

There were, however, a number of success stories. In the Republic of Ireland, the Greens finally appeared to have recovered from their experience in government. Competing in all four constituencies, the party polled at 4.9% and narrowly missed having one MEP elected. The Greens in Sweden and Austria recorded major successes, with a substantial increase in vote share, benefitting from the unpopularity of incumbent governments.

The Green Party of England and Wales also experienced some success. Largely ignored by the media, which preferred to concentrate on the euro-sceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Greens only suffered minor losses in terms of vote share. A very strong performance in South West England nevertheless gave the Greens a third representative in the European Parliament: Molly Scott Cato. This successful outcome sparked renewed interest in the party, leading to a 'green surge' in 2014–15. Membership of the Green Party of England and Wales stood at around 16,000 before the 2014 European elections, but it had risen to 30,900 by the end of 2014 and more than doubled during 2015.²³ Campaigning on a strong anti-austerity platform, the Greens managed to attract many former Liberal Democrats voters disaffected by the party's governmental record in coalition with the Conservatives. In the general election of May 2015, the Green Party of England and Wales received more than one million votes and a share of 3.6%, the best result in its history.²⁴ This helped to re-elect its only MP, Caroline Lucas, with an increased majority, but any hopes of increasing its representation in parliament were disappointed.

The biggest success story of 2014 was that, finally, Green MEPs were elected in East-Central Europe. The Hungarian Politics Can Be Different party (LMP) managed to poll at 5%, which was just enough to elect its first MEP. The LMP probably benefitted from the weakness of the Hungarian Socialist Party. In Croatia, which was taking part in European elections for the first time, a new green party called Croatian Sustainable Development (ORaH) won a seat in the European Parliament with 9.4% of the vote. However, in other parts of Eastern Europe there was little for Greens to cheer about. The Czech Greens achieved a marginally better result than in 2009, polling at 3.8%, but otherwise results below 1% dominate the picture.

Overall, 2014 was a difficult election year for the Greens. The general trends did not fundamentally differ from previous elections. Green parties in Eastern and Southern Europe at the time were less successful, while Greens in Northwestern Europe mainly held their positions, with specific national circumstances determining upward

or downward trends. The negative effect of government involvement was felt more strongly in 2014 than before, with all green parties campaigning as opposition parties and increasing their representation.

Conclusions

What can we learn from the history of green parties' participation in European elections? What influence, if any, did European elections have on the development of green parties?

The overall pattern of European election results for green parties reflects the economic and social conditions in each country. There is a strong correlation between the level of affluence and the support for green parties, which consistently do well in the economically stronger countries of Northern and Western Europe but find it more difficult to win support in the poorer countries of Eastern and Southern Europe. Nevertheless, there is considerable variation within each group of countries.

Other factors outside the control of green parties include the salience of environmental issues and the positioning of rival parties. Environmental issues were clearly the main driving force in the 1980s. Environmental scandals such as the forest fires in Greece have also helped green parties to win representation in the European Parliament. Many green parties have 'diversified' to cover many more issues and avoid being labelled 'single issue' parties. However, surveys show that voters generally associate green parties with 'the environment',²⁵ and it has been quite difficult for green parties, in some countries more than in others, to develop strong issue competence on nonenvironmental issues. In addition, efforts by established parties of both the left and right to lay claim to a 'green' identity have generally not been very successful.

Several green party successes in European elections may be explained, at least in part, with reference to the impact of green party leaders. The names Arnold Cassola (Malta), Paul Rosenmöller (the Netherlands) and Daniel Cohn-Bendit (France) have been mentioned. However, the dominance of charismatic leaders can also provide

challenges for green parties. The principles of grassroots democracy seem to clash with the idea of green parties adopting popular leaders.

The case of Europe Ecology as an alternative model for green party organisation, promoted by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, is perhaps one of the more challenging ideas. The concept of Europe Ecology embracing nonparty movements and individuals had its successes in 2009, but its applicability to other countries and times seems questionable. Yet, this idea of moving away from a party model is shared by Emmanuel Macron and his *En Marche* movement, which succeeded in sweeping away the traditional parties of the left and right in France: Europe Ecology was perhaps an early forerunner of this development. It seems unlikely, however, that a similar model would resonate outside of France.

Charismatic leaders can also be a source of splits in the green movement. While this was avoided in France in 2009, competition between rival green parties had a devastating effect on the early fortunes of the Greens in France, with competing lists preventing green parties from winning representation in the European Parliament in both 1984 and 1994. Several other countries had more than one party claiming to be 'green', particularly in the early phases of green party development. In the EU, founder members Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg all saw more than one green party competing in elections. While these divisions were resolved by mergers in Italy and Luxembourg, in the Netherlands both GreenLeft and the Greens competed in European elections until 2014, although the Greens were the much weaker party and their electoral participation had only a negligible effect on GreenLeft.

Within new EU member states, competition between different green parties has occurred, for example, in Bulgaria and Spain. While competition between EGP member parties in 2014 was limited to Bulgaria and the Netherlands, green parties also have to contend with non-EGP member parties that claim to be 'green', in some cases as a result of splits within the green party. This occurred in 2014 in the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Republic of Ireland. Overall, though, divisions within the green party family have generally been resolved, and party splits are not a serious issue in most countries.

European elections had a positive effect on green party development when they were associated with the provision of additional resources and opportunities. The story of the German Greens benefitting financially from their participation in the 1979 European elections is perhaps fairly unique. More common were the benefits green parties could enjoy from taking advantage of the second-order character of European elections, in which voters felt more free to vote for a party they really preferred, or to cast a protest vote against an unpopular government.

The exact nature of such resource advantages depends, however, on the different opportunities provided by the electoral systems at both a national and European level. The advantages are particularly clear for countries that employ a majority voting system in national elections but a proportional representation system in European elections. The French and British Greens (after 1999) were the main beneficiaries. This situation is reversed for smaller countries, who are allocated a more limited number of seats in the European Parliament; even with proportional representation in place, the vote share required to win representation can be very high, which discourages voters from casting their votes for smaller parties, such as the Greens, who have relatively little chance of success. In certain circumstances, this situation can provide an incentive for smaller parties to join together to form a united green party with a chance of clearing the threshold, as was seen in the Dutch case.

France and the UK are the only countries in the EU that employ a majority electoral system at the national level and a proportional representation system at the European level. Small parties such as the Greens are severely disadvantaged in national elections in these countries, and European elections have been used successfully to win representation and boost the party's profile. However, there is a huge contrast between the two countries in terms of how electoral success in the European elections has been turned into success in national politics. The French Greens have had a continuous presence in the National Assembly since 1997 and participated in national government from 1997 to 2002, and again from 2012 to 2014. By comparison, the

British Greens had their first MP elected in 2010 but without any role in national government. Why did the major successes of both parties in the 1989 European elections lead to such different outcomes?

The key mechanism that allowed the French Greens to make a major impact was their entry into an electoral alliance. The French Greens' failure to translate victory in the 1989 European elections into success in the national parliamentary elections of 1993 led to a debate about their joining an electoral alliance with the Socialist Party. The huge success of the British Greens in 1989 did not have a similar effect. An alliance with other parties was not on the agenda. This only changed after the 2014 European and 2015 general elections, when the idea of a 'progressive alliance' became a major issue. However, the unwillingness of the Labour Party to enter such an alliance in the 2017 general election provided a huge obstacle.²⁶

Several political factors explain this contrast. In the French electoral system of two rounds, electoral alliances are an integral part of electoral politics. In Britain, pre-election alliances are limited to specific historical cases (eg the SDP–Liberal Alliance of the 1980s) and are not a regular feature of party competition. The Socialist Party was in crisis and was eager to set up a broad coalition of left-wing forces to counteract the right in parliament. Moreover, candidate selection in France is centralised, allowing parties (including the Greens) to decide in which constituencies they will field candidates.²⁷ In Britain, the selection of green party candidates is exclusively a decision of constituency parties, making it far more difficult for national agreements to be made and implemented. However, the French experience has not been an unmitigated success. As the Socialists knew the Greens were dependent on them to ensure representation, they faced limited pressure to compromise on key issues. Many Greens were disaffected by the lack of influence the party had within the alliance, and there was strong opposition to its continuation during the 2000s and 2010s. Participation in the Socialist-led government after 2012 proved to be a frustrating experience, and the Greens decided to leave in 2014.

The role of green parties in national coalition governments has been another important element of the experience of Greens in

European elections. Green parties can benefit electorally from government participation. However, lack of competence, internal strife and the pursuit of unpopular policies such as austerity can have a strong negative effect on the electoral performance of green parties, in national as well as in European elections.

How large, then, is the influence of European elections on national politics? Analyses of the ‘Europeanisation’ of parties and party systems have generally expressed scepticism about a major effect.²⁸ Even in European elections, the national context still seems to be dominant. European Parliament debates and decisions usually attract very little media coverage, and for many green politicians, particularly those well established in their home countries, interest in European green affairs is often very limited. Green party successes in European elections can, but do not necessarily, have a positive impact on the fortunes of green parties. Even major successes, such as the record green vote in the UK in 1989, do not necessarily translate into success at a national level. It is still national institutions and politics that determine the influence of European election results.

Looking forward to the European elections of 2019, the Greens appear to be in a promising position in several of their traditional strongholds. On Green Sunday, 14 October 2018, a ‘green wave’ swept through Belgium, Luxembourg and Bavaria (Germany). Both the Flemish and Walloon Greens scored major successes in local elections.²⁹ In Luxembourg, the Greens polled 15.1% in parliamentary elections: 5 percentage points up from 2013, when they had joined a government coalition with liberals and socialists.³⁰ In regional elections in Bavaria, the Greens scored 17.5%, marking an increase of 8.9% since 2013. At a federal level, the poll rating of the Greens during October 2018 stood at between 16% and 19%, up from 8.9% in the federal elections of 2017.³¹ Greens also appear to be doing well in the Netherlands and Finland, but recent elections have seen setbacks for green parties in Austria, France, Italy and Sweden. Increasing support for Greens in the Low Countries and in Germany provides a strong basis for continued success in European elections.

Appendix

Table 1. Green European election results, 1979–2014.

	1979	1984 (1987)	1989	1994 (1995–6)	1999	2004 (2007)	2009	2014	Avg
Austria	—	—	—	6.8	9.2	12.9	9.7	14.5	10.6
Belgium	3.4*	8.2*	13.9*	11.5*	16.0*	8.7*	13.5*	11.0*	10.8
Bulgaria	—	—	—	—	—	0.5	0.7	0.9*	0.7
Croatia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9.4†	—
Cyprus	—	—	—	—	—	0.9	1.5	(7.7)	1.2
Czech Republic	—	—	—	—	—	3.2	2.1	3.8	3.0
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—	8.0‡	15.9†	11.0	11.6
Estonia	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.7	0.3	1.5
Finland	—	—	—	7.6	13.4	10.4	12.4	9.3	10.6
France	4.4	6.7*	10.6	5.0*	9.7	7.2	(16.3)	9.0	8.6
Germany	3.2	8.2	8.4	10.1	6.4	11.9	12.1	10.7	8.9
Greece	—	—	2.6*	0.8*	1.5*	0.7	3.5	0.9	1.7
Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	—	(2.6)	5.0	—
Ireland	—	1.9	3.7	7.9	6.7	4.3	1.9	4.9	4.7
Italy	—	—	6.2*	3.2	1.8	2.5	(3.1)	0.9	3.0

Latvia	—	—	—	—	—	(4.3)	(3.7)	(8.3)	—
Lithuania	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Luxembourg	1.0	6.1*	11.3*	10.9*	10.7	15.0	16.8	15.0	10.9
Malta	—	—	—	—	—	9.3	2.3	3.0	4.9
Netherlands	4.4*	6.9*	7.0*	6.1*	11.9	7.4	9.1*	7.2*	7.5
Poland	—	—	—	—	—	0.3	[2.4]	0.3	0.3
Portugal	—	[11.5]	[14.4]	[11.2]	[10.3]	[9.1]	[10.6]	[12.7]	—
Romania	—	—	—	—	—	0.4	—	0.3	0.4
Slovakia	—	—	—	—	—	[16.9]	2.1	0.5	1.3
Slovenia	—	—	—	—	—	(2.3)	2.0	—	2.0
Spain	—	0.9*	2.7*	0.8*	2.1*	[48.4]	[6.2]	[11.0]	1.6
Sweden	—	—	—	17.2	9.5	5.9	11.0	15.4	11.8
UK	0.1	0.5	14.5	3.1*	5.5*	6.1*	8.6*	7.7*	5.8

Note: The question of the inclusion or non-inclusion of parties can be difficult in countries where green party history has seen a lot of organisational discontinuity and rivalry between different parties claiming to be 'green'. In these countries, we have included all parties that could be considered possible candidates up to the foundation of the EGP in 2004. For 2004, 2009 and 2014 only the vote share of members of the EGP are given. For parties that had EGP observer status at the time of the elections, the election results are indicated by the sign †. For elections in which the results of several green parties are combined, this is indicated by an asterisk (*) and the names of the parties are included in the 'Parties and sources' section (pp. 40–4). A further question arises from the candidacy of green parties as part of electoral alliances also involving non-green parties in which the share of the vote of green parties cannot be identified. Results for electoral alliances in which green parties participated as major or equal partners are displayed in round brackets (). Results for electoral alliances in which green parties were junior partners are displayed in square brackets []. Electoral results of electoral alliances are not taken into account in the calculation of the average vote share. All values are given as percentages.

Table 2. Seats won in European elections by green parties, 1979–2014 (all values given as percentages).

	1979	1984	1989	1994 (1995-6)	1999	2004 (2005-7)	2009 (2013)	2014	Avg
Austria	—	—	—	1	2	2	2	3	2.0
Belgium	0	2	3	2	5	2	3	2	2.4
Bulgaria	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0.0
Croatia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Cyprus	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0.0
Czech Republic	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0.0
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	1.5
Estonia	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0.0
Finland	—	—	—	1	2	1	2	1	1.4
France	0	0	9	0	9	6	14	6	5.5
Germany	0	7	8	12	7	13	14	11	9.0
Greece	—	—	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.2
Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	1	0.5

Ireland	—	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.6
Italy	—	—	5	3	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	2.0
Latvia	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Lithuania	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Luxembourg	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.6
Malta	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Netherlands	0	2	2	1	4	2	2	3	2	2	2	2.0
Poland	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Portugal	—	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1
Romania	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	0	0	0.0
Slovakia	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Slovenia	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	—	—	0.0
Spain	—	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	0.6
Sweden	—	—	—	4	2	2	1	2	4	4	4	2.6
UK	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	1.1
TOTAL	0	11	28	27	38	35	47	37	37	37	37	—

Parties and sources

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Endnotes

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 - 5 In the academic literature, Herbert Kitschelt in particular conceived green parties as a type of 'left-libertarian' party, cf. Herbert Kitschelt,

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 - 23 The Scottish Green Party increased its membership substantially during 2014, but this was mainly a result of the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014. Elections to the European Parliament have been less important for the Scottish Greens. Having the whole of Scotland as a European constituency, with just six MEPs elected (since 2009, seven in 2004 and eight in 1999), the share of the vote required for representation was well above the results the party achieved in Scottish parliamentary elections. However, the Scottish Greens came quite close in 2014, polling their best ever result with 8.1% of the vote, just 2.4 percentage points short of the share of the vote achieved by the list of the sixth MEP elected in Scotland.

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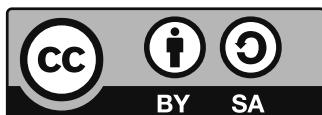
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