

THE PRAGMATIC WAY OF EUROPEAN FEDERALISM

If the European Council was to accept the proposal, adopted by the European Parliament last May, to organize the tenth European elections on Thursday, **May 9, 2024** - the day on which Christians celebrate Ascension - it would be **485 days before** the end of the ninth European legislature.

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Between now and May 9, 2024, the national political balances could change in **Poland, Finland, Luxembourg, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Slovakia, and Bulgaria** after the legislative elections which will take place in 2023. Early legislative elections are also a possibility in **France**, where **Emmanuel Macron** lost his absolute majority in the National Assembly last June.

There are no votes for the national Parliament in the **Czech Republic** and **Cyprus**, but the presidential elections could affect the national political balances. The Cypriot President also has governmental functions, and the current Czech president, **Miloš Zeman**, supports foreign policy choices favorable to **Putin's** Russia.

According to current polls, the center-right could strengthen in the European Council of Heads of State and Government, as happened with the recent elections in **Sweden** and **Italy**. This would make a conservative alliance in the European elections more likely in May 2024.

This hypothesis emerged, moreover, in the two meetings between the head of the EPP group in the European Parliament, the Bavarian **Manfred Weber**, and the leader of the European Conservatives and Reformists, the Italian **Giorgia Meloni**. The possible accession of the Fratelli d'Italia to the EPP and the candidacy of **Roberta Metsola** to the presidency of the European Commission as *Spitzenkandidatin* at the front of the European center-right have been examined. Such developments would end the historic convergence of the "great coalition" between EPP and S&D with the support of the Liberals.

Therefore, if we rely on the current polls, in 2024 the European Union could be governed by the center-right. The center-right could hold both the European Council, which has assumed a predominant role in the European system since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the European Parliament, and the European Commission. Nonetheless, the Commissioners are appointed by the national governments in agreement with the President of the Commission. This hybrid system assigns to the European executive both political and technical tasks under the double control of the European Parliament and national governments. It provides therefore for the cohabitation of members of the European Commission who at the national level belong to opposing majorities and minorities.

The break-up of the grand coalition between EPP and S&D with the support of Liberals, with the eventual victory of a conservative alliance in the Council and the European Parliament, would have two negative consequences on the functioning of the European system:

- the development or non-development of EU policies would be conditioned by the prevalence of a confederal approach, that is, by the constant search for a compromise between often conflicting national interests; by a reductive interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity in the division of competences between the EU and the Member States; by a recurrent challenge to the primacy of EU law and by a nationalist vision of the rule of law which will render the concept of common values meaningless;
- a conflict between the members of the European Commission, which would be called to respond at the same time to the solicitations of a new European parliamentary majority and to the governments which designated them, with majorities that are sometimes different from the one in the European Parliament.

The risks of a progressive disintegration of the European Union would be more evident in this case due to the increasing conflict between the institutions and within the individual institutions. Moreover, this would happen precisely when the European Union will have to take joint decisions to pass from emergency answers (the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the fight against climate change, cybersecurity, external interferences, and migratory flows...) to planning its future. Important topics will include the creation of internal policies necessary to guarantee European public goods financed by real own resources and European public debt, launching external policies necessary for its strategic autonomy, and adopting constitutional reforms necessary given its expansion towards the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

In the conservative European movements, much more than in the left, the idea of the confederal dimension of the European Union prevails. At the center there is the defense of national interests, a defense linked to the concept of the nation as the territorial dimension of a non-existent space occupied by a single ethnic community.

European alliances begin to emerge in view of the European elections in May 2024. The meetings held in Rome between Manfred Weber and Giorgia Meloni were only a taste of what's to come. Not everyone within the EPP is at peace with the idea of an alliance with the extreme right in Europe. Such a convergence is unthinkable in **Poland**, **Belgium**, and the **Netherlands** but also in **Germany** between the CDU and the CSU on the one hand and AFD on the other.

It is uncertain, for example, what will the European liberal family led by Emmanuel Macron do. Macron's allies are in government with the Social Democrats and the Greens in Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg. Furthermore, the French president is committed to a sovereign Europe opposed to that of national sovereignties and is not favorable towards the Spitzenkandidaten method, on which the conservative coalition in support of Roberta Metsola might rely.

This is a disruptive choice that will not only concern the liberals but, as we have said above, a part of the EPP. The party will be divided between the **confederal conservatism** of the Weber-Meloni couple and the **Christian populism** of the universalist culture of **Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer** and **Alcide De Gasperi**. The social democrats will also be split between the **Labour sovereignty** in Northern Europe and the **solidarity internationalism** of the Iberians, Germany and Austria, Benelux, Italy, and a part of Central Europe.

Is it possible to imagine a courageous and innovative response to the conservative confederal alliance and their reactionary *epiphora* with the construction – difficult but necessary – **of a coalition of ideas and programs**? Such a coalition would have to go beyond the airtight enclosures of empty European parties and choose the **pragmatic path of European federalism**, solidarity and democracy. It would have to address civil society, the world of work and environmentally sustainable production to ask them to support a European government project supported by a majority in the European Parliament that will be elected in 2024 and that shares the challenge of **constitutional reform** of the European Union.

In building such a project we should think **of the manifesto of the European Resistance** written in Geneva in 1944 inspired by the **Ventotene Manifesto** and of the project of the **White Rose** of the **Scholl brothers**. We must channel the liberalism of **Luigi Einaudi** and later of **Bronislaw Geremek**, the dream of a European constitution of **Vaclav Havel**, **Willy Brandt's** idea of a European Parliament as a permanent constituent body, the Europe of peace and brotherhood of **Alex Langer**. We will know that their vision was not a dream but the project of a political battle that was worth and that is worth fighting.

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