

Germany and France's far right make gains in EU elections

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Berlin, June 10 (RHC)-- The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is on track to take second place in Sunday's EU election, according to projections from public broadcaster ARD, underscoring the party's resilience ahead of next year's federal election.

The Eurosceptic party was set to secure a record 16.5 percent of the vote on Sunday, according to an exit poll published by ARD.

That was 5.5 percentage points more than in the last European Union election in 2019, and more than all three parties in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition. The conservatives, who are in opposition at the federal level, have been forecast to come first, rising slightly to 29.5 percent.

Germany's Greens were the biggest losers on Sunday, falling 8.5 percentage points to 12 percent, punished by voters for the cost of policies to reduce CO2 emissions – in line with expectations for environmental parties across Europe.

Scholz's Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the third coalition partner, the pro-business Free Democratic Party (FDP), also fared poorly, expected to win 14 percent and 5 percent of the vote respectively, down from 15.8 percent and 5.4 percent in the previous election.

The results are in line with an expected broader shift rightwards for the European Parliament across the bloc of 450 million citizens. The strong showing comes as Germany's party landscape undergoes its biggest upheaval in decades, with new populist parties vying to take space vacated by the shrinking mainstream parties that have dominated since reunification in 1990.

This looks set to make it much harder for established parties to form workable coalitions, and is coarsening the political climate, say analysts. The campaign was overshadowed by a surge in violence against politicians and activists.

The AfD was plagued by scandals in recent months, with its lead candidate having to step back from campaigning in May after declaring that the SS, the Nazis' main paramilitary force, were "not all criminals".

"We've done well because people have become more anti-European," the AfD's co-leader Alice Weidel said on Sunday. "People are annoyed by so much bureaucracy from Brussels," she added, giving a plan ultimately to ban CO2-emitting cars as an example.

Besides Germany, projected results from France put Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally around 33 percent, with 31 seats in the incoming European Parliament – more than double the score of President Emmanuel Macron's liberals, at 15 percent.

Reporting from Berlin, Al Jazeera's Step Vaessen said that the Eurosceptic parties appeared set to form a large bloc in the next European Parliament. "With this very large bloc of far-right parties, there can be an influence on climate policies, for example ... Also, [the EU's] agriculture policies ... and migration policies, which is a very important issue here in Germany and in the Netherlands," she said.

However, Vaessen noted that the far-right parties are not united. "They have a lot of divisions among themselves, and they have been trying to reach out to each other. We've seen [France's] Marine Le Pen, for example, reaching out to [Prime Minister] Giorgia Meloni in Italy," she said.

"But after tonight, we will have to see how these groups will be formed and what kind of influence they will have."

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