

Technological aspects of the EP elections 2014





- Alliance of S&D and EPP retains control over the European Parliament - 412 deputies (54.85% of the votes in the EP). Their tactical allies - ALDE obtained 67 deputies (11.4% of the votes in the EP). Eurosceptics from ECR became the third largest faction surpassing the ALDE.
- The turnout in the MEPs elections as a whole remained without significant changes in comparison with 2009. Turnout fell sharply in the Baltic states (Estonia, with 43.9 to 36.44, in Latvia with 53.7 to 30.04), with the exception of Lithuania.

1. There is an ongoing Americanization of election campaigns: Internet, social networking, «door-to-door». However, a complete copy of the American model is not possible. It is constrained by differences in political systems and strict legislative regulation of campaign rules in financing and advertising.
2. Despite a low turnout in the elections to the EP as compared to national elections, their importance increases (more important role of the EP in the budget process, the leading role of the EP in the election of the President of the EU Commission).
3. The relative success performance of the far-right parties was not converted into political influence at the European Union level and it is unlikely to become a long-term trend. The political system has great potential to minimize their impact.

- 
- Growing discontent of political system and quality of current parliamentary democracy among European voters.
Cure:
 - «White vote» on the European level;
 - Changing of national electoral systems to limit radicals (for example France);
 - A significant part of the European electorate, which can be described as «conservative», wants to maintain the status quo and does not have any tendency to radical changes. Such European voters still support the pragmatic center-right forces (first of all Christian Democratic parties).

- Secularization still affects the European continent. Level of involvement of voters into church affairs declines. Church influence over voting behavior falls. Besides, the church is becoming less conservative force, shows willing to reform with society;
- New conservative European citizens are born - Muslims. Fighting for a non-Christian conservative voter in Europe is just beginning. And while the far-right parties collect situational votes using anti-Islamic rhetoric, the center-right are looking for technology to engage conservative Muslims in their electorate. But for now Muslims stay for center-left due to their softline policy towards migrants;
- in some countries failures of government policy leads to a real and substantial growth of radicalism (primarily France, but also Spain, Italy and Greece).

MEPs elections seriously differ from the national level elections (in Germany this trend is less recognizable):

- Less motivation among ordinary voters and politicians;
- Less funding;
- Another model of election campaigns (the largest gap in the results occur in those countries where national elections are held in single-seat constituencies, particularly in France and the UK).

The 2014 election campaign received all European personalization for the first time. Not only parties were in the game but also personalities of candidates for the European Commission Presidency: leader of European social democrats Martin Schulz and leader of European center-right Jean-Claude Juncker. Debates between EPP and S&D leaders were held on European level.

In the center of the technological boom are viral advertising, social networks, local media and - GOTV in recent years

- **Election participants management.** Direct collusions with spoilers and opponents are not in practice, but there is a mild boost to cooperate or direct help during the barrier breakthrough (as socialists helped M. Le Pen in the collection of signatures for the presidential elections in France cause it was helpful for them in clash with Sarkozy);
- Favorite method to discredit opponents used by right-wing politicians remains broad media campaigns, from the left - the initiation of criminal proceedings against opponents on matters of corruption or fraud in the previous election campaigns (the latter is possible due to a more strict rules of financing political activities).



- Practice of large public political meetings with speeches from candidates returns. By itself, the electoral impact of such events without media coverage is small. Therefore, organizers are making major efforts for building a high-quality TV pictures;
- In most European countries there are restrictions on the amount of paid political advertising in the media (in France, paid political advertising on TV in general is prohibited - so there is no practice of US favorite TV spots). Therefore, there is a problem with the production and placement of spots - they are mainly present on the Internet;

- Europeans have adopted the practice of Obama-style online campaigns and revived the practice of canvassing (with the exception of Germany, where the "door-to-door" campaign is perceived as an unacceptable invasion into privacy);
- Micro targeting and GOTV are now at the heart of electoral technologies in the United States but in Europe there are some legal restrictions on collection of personal data that prevent them to become a core element of election campaigns;
- Growing of Internet as communication space becomes an advantage of politicians, parties and movements who skillfully use viral advertising (VOM) and provocative event-management (Italian movement «Five Stars»);
- Grand parties with solid budgets have sophisticated system of work with the expert community («talking heads» or pundits). There is no place for practice of direct "payment for loyalty", but politicians and parties "tame" experts in advance - by involving them into grants program, paid participation in the "brainstorming" on certain substantive issues or program developing;

- Standard buzz-making (creating of information wave) technology works as follows: opinion leaders (politicians, experts significant) trigger trend ideas to Twitter, then these ideas unwind in Facebook, then picked up by online media, newspapers, radio and TV;
- Another U.S. fashion - the latest achievements of neuropsychology, program advertising, etc., in the European elections almost did not survive due to limited budgets, lack of specialists and the negative attitude of the European public opinion for manipulative techniques;
- Sociological tools of Europeans are much less sophisticated compared to ones from the United States and the Russian Federation;
- The content of elections campaigns resembles melting pot of ideologies. Opposition stakes on totally self-contradictory populism. Ruling parties – on the incorporation direct opponents rhetoric and creating "mirror" effect using slogans and technologies of opponents.

- There is a shift of parties activities from traditional TV format into the WWW, where the availability of video content is rising;
- Management and targeting within extensive and detailed database of voters was used in the Obama's presidential campaigns, in Europe such techniques are limited by the legislation that protects personal data;
- Canvassing or "door-to-door" campaign during MEP elections was broadly used only by euro enthusiasts from social-democratic parties. Nationally oriented center-right have less motivation to implement this technology in the MEPs elections;
- Pre-election rally remains a popular technology, it works especially well in cases of charismatic speakers.



- **Using the image of an enemy.** For example, in France image of dangerous illegal migrant from Maghreb evolved into image of unwanted legal migrant from the underdeveloped countries of the EU (first of all from Romania). In the periphery of the EU (Hungary, etc.) the conservative parties use as an enemy image of the well-fed, posh Brussels bureaucrat. Target of attack from traditional left-wing parties and the Social Democrats in all EU countries are the rich, whose privileges are expected to become less due to the tax burden;



- Voting as a referendum on trust towards current national government;
- Increasing the authority of the EU (Brussels bureaucracy);
- Increasing the authority of MEPs;
- Party politics is personalized on EU level - Elections of the President of the European Commission - the head of a key EU executive body.

Euroscepticism. Negative and hostile attitudes towards politics of Brussels - the most powerful driver of coordination of radical forces both on the left and the right flanks. However, euroscepticism has many shades and the total national break with EU institutions is not supported by all eurosceptics and their sympathizers. Nevertheless, it becomes harder and harder for the system forces to win elections under the banner of integration and continuation of life in a united Europe. In addition, increased criticism of Brussels Agenda worse running in national elections, which makes high performance of eurosceptic parties in MEPs elections situational. "National Front" and UKIP are unlikely to repeat their success in the following national elections.



Victory of eurosceptics in the UK and Denmark, which are not in the euro zone, do not correlate with the success of the national governments, rather they indicate the attitude of the population to the continuation of European integration. Here, if parties just take a tough anti-European stance they quietly pass around their more moderate opponents. In France and Italy, Euro-skeptics needed something more: a mix of right-wing and left-wing political slogans for the new electorate. That was a success strategy to Marine Le Pen's "National Front" in France, and to a lesser extent to the Italian League North and the "Movement of 5 stars."

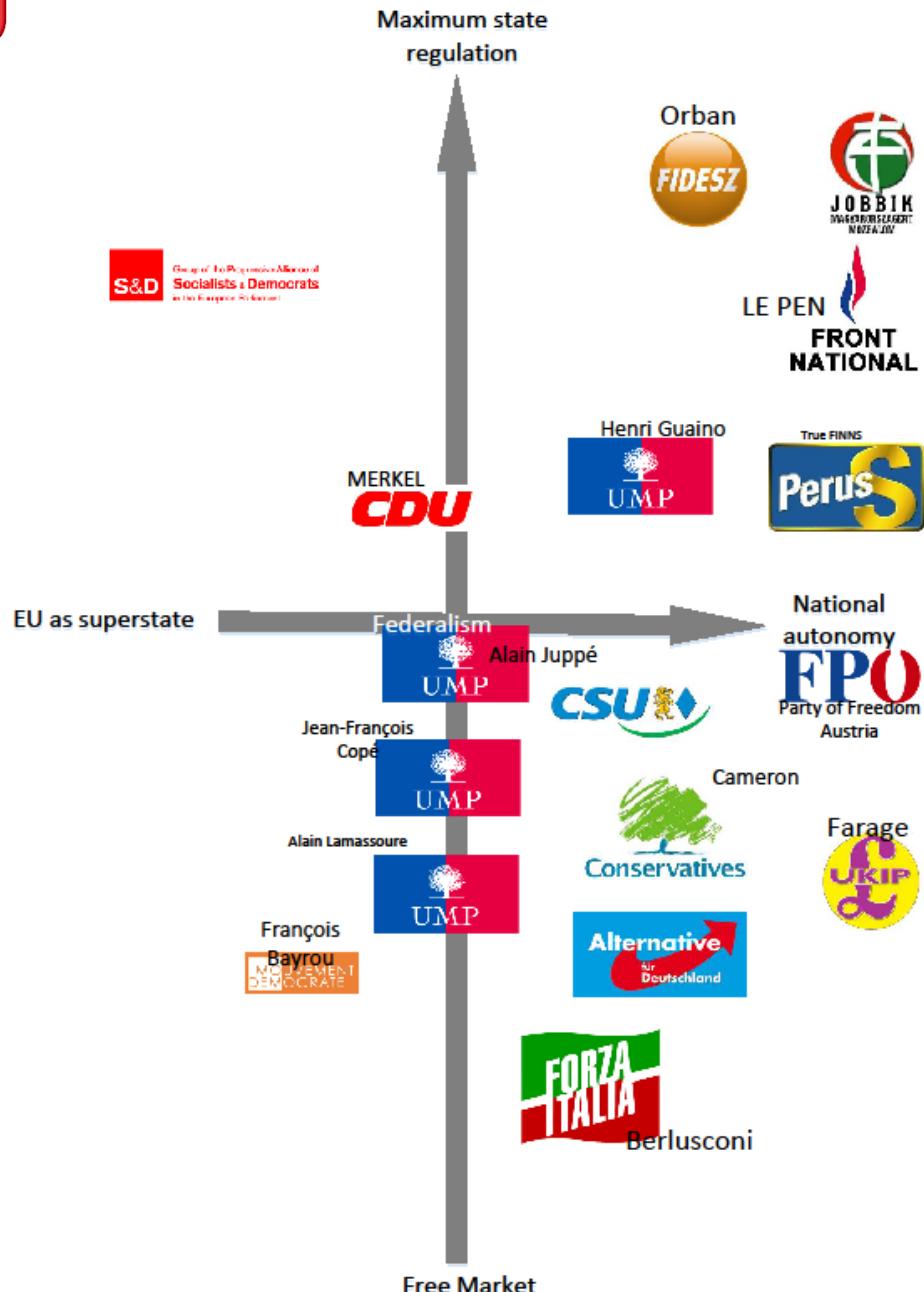
Regionalism. Sustainable and replicable ideas about historical regions as a self-contained part of Europe, regardless of inclusion into the modern national state. Used either directly (examples: Catalonia, Padania, Bavaria, Flanders) and indirectly (regions of France). Political parties using the theme of regional identity is not bound by a common ideology.

- A focus on current economic issues and challenges. The success of various parties was often dependent on their relationship to the events that took place here and now, and not from long-term campaign promises
- A huge impact of the political culture. From north to south in Europe the culture is changing from the most compromised and communitarian (the Scandinavians) to the most emotional and selfish (Greeks, Italians).



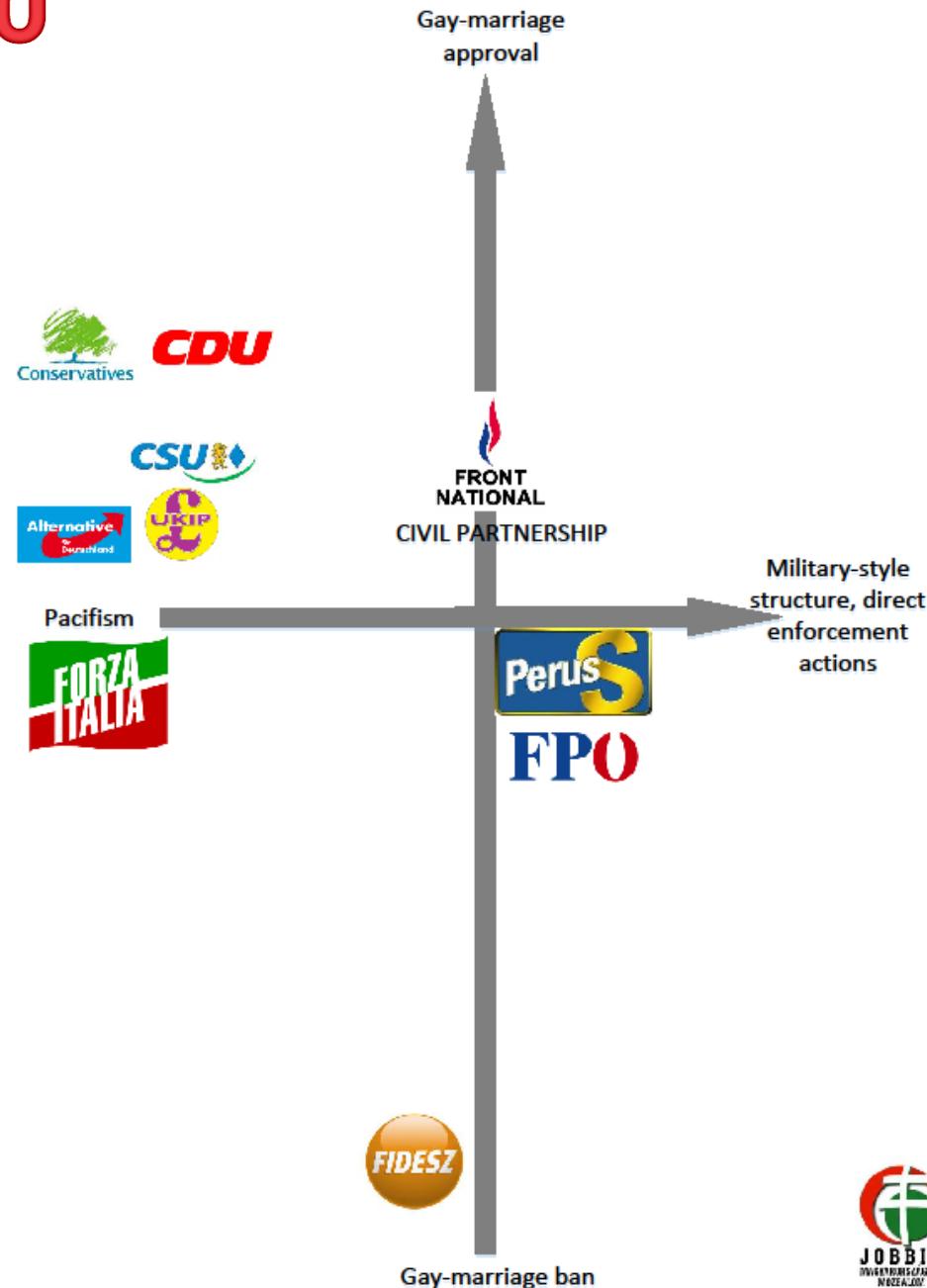
Leaders. Role of leadership in European politics increases. Personalization as a political technology is becoming common for conservative parties. Strong personalization often substitutes ideology, institutions and even party structures. Campaigns are carried out with a focus on bright, charismatic (V. Orban, Angela Merkel) and even scandalous (Berlusconi, M. Le Pen) individual leaders.

- The European countries political process can hardly be described as definite conservative wave rising or conservative revolution, but there is a wide and growing use of conservative ideology at the national level. Parties across all the political spectrum take alone far-left can combine during elections any elements that had been part of the solid continental conservatism ideology in the past;
- Conservatism ideology always has national character;
- Ideological positions of national European conservative parties on the key issues of discussion is extremely blurry (see next slide).



Family values. Family values are important in European politics, by definition, but it is not a commitment to a competitive advantage for European politician. At the same time, even conservative politicians can afford to divorce (see the story of N. Sarkozy) or even principally live in a «civil marriage» (such as twice-divorced Marine Le Pen) and it's not hitting their electoral chances. Even in the conservative and Catholic Lithuania charges of lesbian attitude were not crucial for the presidential ambitions of Dalia Grybauskaite.

Gay marriage legalization. The urgency and importance of the gay marriages problem in European society has passed its peak. Currently, in most countries it is not a strong irritant to the public. It should be understood that the right-wing conservative party, tend to take on a compromise position, left-wing parties fully support the expansion of LGBT rights. This situation seemingly creates a great opportunity for right-wing parties, but their lack of confidence in the cohesion of the electorate around the undesirability of legal gay marriage pushes them more fogging own position (for example see position without position presented by UKIP).



National interests. The discourse of national interests primacy are often used for the separation and even opposition between European interests and those of the nation state, but in a radical way such position does not find much public support. Most of the center-right parties from EPP group confident maneuvering and speak about «the persecution of national interests within the EU structures». Another option of acting out of this topic is to demonstrate rhetorical commitment to the ideals of civic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism in the developed countries of Western Europe is a total taboo. System politicians can not actually afford it. In Eastern Europe the stake on the national interest in politics regularly becomes similar to the interests of ethnic nation, enough examples of Finland, Austria, Hungary and Baltic states.

Strict policy towards migrants (as aliens to the European culture and European values and / or as an aliens to the national traditions). Another pillar of the current agenda of conservatism, which are sold well in elections at any level, but poorly correlated with the liberal interpretation of human rights and demographic situation in EU countries.

Anti-atlantism, anti-Americanism. Another possible element of the conservative agenda has largely not geopolitical but economic nature and claims to protect the interests of European business to the aggressive behavior of an American business.

Protection of interests (political and economic) of the traditional electoral groups and protection of traditional lifestyles. Representation of large homogeneous groups as ones suffering from the penetration of foreign culture and customs is a standard political strategy, used as by the moderate center-right as by far-right (in a rigid connection with the need to get rid of unwanted migrants). The rhetoric of the struggle against the domination of multinational corporations and transnational media also is used.

Abortion. This topic was not used during the campaign. Public pressure groups against the realities of European legalization of abortion came with nothing, as opposed to the United States (Pro-Choice issue).

Evaluation of the significance of conservative agenda items

Element of conservative agenda	EU significance (0 min -10 max)	Examples of countries where the value of the element in the election campaign is lower	Examples of countries where the value of the element in the election campaign is higher
Euroscepticism (including towards internal EU migrants)	8	Belgium, Luxembourg	UK, Austria, France, Denmark
Strict policy towards external migrants	6	Germany	UK, Austria, France, Denmark
National interests	4	Germany	Hungary, France, Finland
Family values	2	France	Germany
Legal gay-marriage	1	Austria, Netherlands	Hungary, Poland
Abortion	0	—	Poland
Anti-Americanism	0	Poland, Bulgaria, Baltic states	France

- Natural conservatives in Europe (EPP political group) are still strong and much more electorally successful than radical conservatives (far-right) calling on to dramatic social and institutional change, speaking about returning to nation Golden age;
- Natural conservatives in Europe have successfully mastered the practice of incorporating alternative agendas of their political opponents. Popular requests, ideas and solutions quickly involved in the agenda of the center-right parties, which helps them to keep the electoral leadership and even enlarge the base of support with more and more new groups;
- Increasing the authority of EPP group in connection with the new procedure for electing the head of European Commission creates even more tension between Brussels and the UK which ruling Conservative party is not a part of the People's parties Alliance. Risk of the UK withdraw from the EU remains.

- Most of all senior positions in the European Parliament (speakers, vice-speakers, heads of committees) are occupied by representatives of Germany (the Germans led 5 of 22 committees of the European Parliament, 4 of 7 parliamentary official groups are also headed by Germans). Poland is in the second place , Polish politicians received 4 Committees, just like the Italians. The British got three committees, one went to the Conservatives from ECR group (Committee of the internal market and consumer protection). France suffered a heavy lost after the distribution of committees, French still controls only 2 committees due to the fact that national winner Marine Le Pen was not able to form her own official group in the European Parliament, and therefore had a weak position when bargaining for posts;

Resources:

- The poor economic situation;
- The growth of European bureaucracy interference in the internal affairs of nation-states, the local affairs of municipalities;
- The crisis of the party systems of the European countries because of the constant convergence of the Social Democrats with the center-right to the point of complete mixing (many French, for example, believe that hybrid of two parties "UMPS" rules);
- A flexible combination of right and left-wing rhetoric to succeed (National Front);
- Search for new electoral niches due to the shift of traditional conservatives to the left.

Problems:

- Grand coalition of People's Party (EPP), the Social Democrats (S&D) and the liberals (ALDE) in the European Parliament is extremely stable. European experts believe that all the factions that are to the «right» of the EPP, will be excluded from decision making process. If necessary, a grand coalition will block with green and move further to the left. This is clearly reflected in the outcome of the Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament elections. Of the 14 people who have received this status, Eurosceptics were able to get only one place for the ECR group. While EPP took just 6 seats, the Social Democrats 3 (but they also got a chair of the President) and even liberals ALDE — 2 vice-presidential seat with fewer deputies in comparison with the ECR. Radical Eurosceptics from EFDD group put forward Fabio Castaldo of the "Movement 5 stars" but lost in three-round vote.

Problems:

- Morals and habits are becoming more free, the electorate focused exclusively on conservative values, declining;
- There are serious limitations to the usage of effective conservative agenda in full: in the highest demand there are such elements as euroscepticism and critic of national governments;
- The absence of influential positions in the European Parliament and the inability to create a single fraction of right-wing parties make rationally minded voters feel that their voices are wasted. In the next election cycle such voters can ignore the polls, or choose moderate politicians.

European elections showed a high correlation between a current popularity of the national governments and the results of voting for MEPs. In Italy, where the new government of M. Renzi as a whole managed to stabilize the economic situation, his Social Democratic Party won a landslide victory. Exactly the same situation is typical of Spain, where the ruling Popular Party passed European elections successfully.

In France, where the government formed by F. Hollande, is constantly pursued by the failure, the Social Democrats suffered a crushing defeat. In Greece, where the success of the ruling center-right party are controversial, in elections to the European Parliament won Radical Left Coalition (part of the group GUE/NGL), but the defeat of the center-right did not look disastrous. In Germany and Austria the ruling center-right and the Social Democrats coalition confidently confirmed their status, but the similarity of their pre-election positions was used by other right-wing parties who have received a significant number of votes (Alternative for Germany and Austrian Freedom Party). In Hungary, as the ruling party, "Fides", by contrast, attacked the positions of their far-right opponents from Jobbik party, that led to a significant reduction of the results of the far-right opposition.

The level of support for traditional (natural) conservatives in the whole of Europe is reduced due to the level of education. Currently right conservatism in Europe closer to the poor and less educated groups. Elites support only organic conservatism which allows them to maintain the status quo.

The attitude of the continental European conservatives to preserve the institutions can not be called an extremely tough. In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon conservative ideas, it is pretty easy for them to change the rules and principles in the political sphere (increase the term of presidency office, change the rules of election of deputies, etc.). European conservatives often do not try to preserve the institution simply because it has long existed in its present form, they are willing to reform and change the rules of the game. The closest gap between the Anglo-Saxon type of conservatism demonstrate the German Christian Democrats, since the German Constitution entitles the German government to defend democracy, and therefore, any proposed changes to the constitution can be seen as anti-democratic appeals.



Drift shown by Christian Democratic parties to the left, toward the protection of the welfare state unequivocally helps them in the political struggle, losing about 5-6% of far-right voters, they get up to 10-12% of the voters, advocating a greater role of state in the economy regulation.



www.minchenko.ru

| research | analytics | PR | GR | geopolitical lobbying |

MINCHENKO CONSULTING Communication Group
38, Bolshoy Tishinsky lane, office 730, 123557, Moscow, Russia
Phone: +7 (495) 605-3681 Fax: +7 (495) 605-3680
office@minchenko.ru

This study was carried out with the financial support of the Institute
of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (<http://isepr.ru>)