

Europe's Great Divide

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In our previous post ([here](#)), we described post-electoral Europe's stalemate in a European version of the "Impossible Triplet" sketched by Dani Rodrik to describe the dilemmas of globalization. We drew a triangle given by the three constitutive dimensions of the EU: "European integration", "National sovereignty", "Democratic consensus". Each one is incompatible with the other two. One out of three must be given up. In this triangle we also located the options of the major European political families in the aftermath of the elections (see Figure 1). We argued that the elections did not solve the dilemma about which among the three goals will be waived.

Figure 1

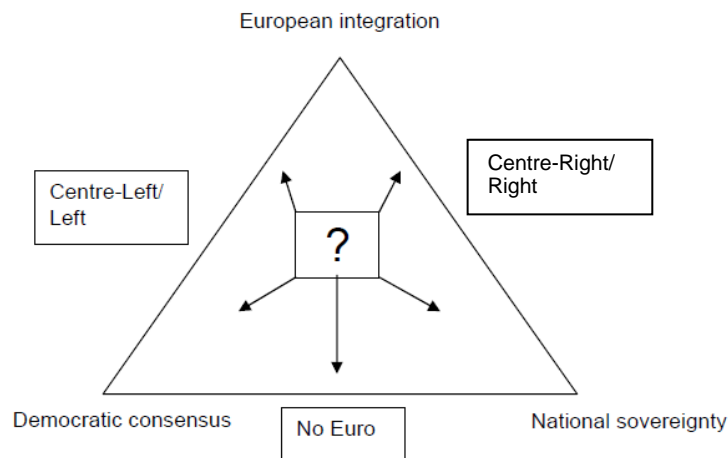


Table 1

Centre-Right/Right (CR/R)	EPP, ALDE, ECR	358	47.7%
Centre-Left/Left (CL/L)	S&D, GREENS/EFA, GUE/NGL	293	39.0%
No Euro (NoE)	EFD	48	6.4%
Others		52	6.9%
Total		751	100.0%

EEP = European People's Party, ALDE = Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ECR = European Conservatives and Reformists, S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, GREENS/EFA = The Greens-European Free Alliance, GUE/NGL = Guache Unitaire Européene / Nordic Green Left, EFD = Europe of Freedom and Democracy (UKIP, 5STARS)

Table 1 maps electoral results (in terms of seats in the Parliament) on the Triangle. It goes without saying that our mapping is somewhat arbitrary and does not exactly

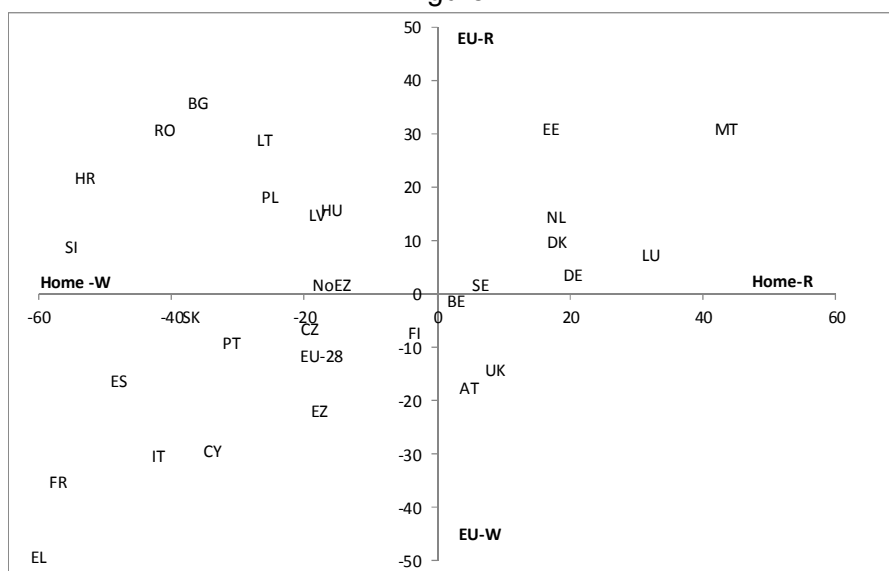
correspond to actual political agreements and coalitions. To say the least, the area so-called "Euroskeptical" is larger than our NoE. Some parties outside the official coalitions (classified as Others) are definitely anti-euro and anti-Europe (e.g. the Northern League in Italy and Marine Le Pen's party in France). The respective right and left wing of our CR/R and CL/L aggregations are closer to the Euroskepticals against the European limitations to popular sovereignty and national interests. As a matter of fact, the true political scenario is even more crippling than it appears in our Triangle.

The parties openly against Europe are heterogeneous under many other dimensions and are far away from the others as well. They are unable to form a political coalition favouring a process towards "National sovereignty + Democratic consensus" on the bottom side of the triangle, that is the end of the EU as we know it. The CL/L parties have by and large gathered discontent and protest with the current state of affairs in Europe promising to change Europe. An ingredient of the recipe is a relaxation, if not renegotiation, of the Euro Zone (EZ) fiscal rules, along with an accelerated move towards a full-fledged democratic and – at least ideally – federalist Union, that is somewhere on the left side of the Triangle. However, it is not clear how far this electorate is ready to go along the way of devolution of national sovereignty. The CR/R parties won the elections offering protection to national interests and fears (especially in the North), rather than more Europe and cooperation (with the South), thus leaning towards the right side of the triangle. But it is not clear whether they will allow for more integration in small homeopathic doses filtered through "National sovereignty" by way of the "intergovernmental method", or they will simply defend the *status quo* vetoing any reform of the existing institutional architecture of the EU, and first and foremost of the EZ. Therefore, we concluded that the journey towards a "genuine European Union" will have to be long and tortuous, and we envisaged as a viable way out of the *status quo* the intermediate stage of an enhanced policy coordination mechanism among national governments that replaces the present pseudo-technical, pseudo-automatic application of fixed rules.

Looking at the electoral data in greater detail at the national level, and in the light of subsequent Eurobarometer opinion polls, an even more problematic picture emerges. Behind Europe's political stalemate, we can see Europe's Great Divide between *national* majorities favouring the *status quo* (though possibly for different reasons) and others calling for a change (albeit disorderly). We think this picture is worrisome because it indicates a tendency to "*nationalize*" the conflicting views of the public opinions towards Europe, or from another side, a tendency to "*politicize*" the divide between the so-called "Core" and "Periphery" countries concerning causes and remedies of the crisis. What we mean is that e.g. the Italians who vote Left or Right do not wish the same Europe as e.g. the Germans who vote Left or Right, whereas on European matters the distance between Left and Right within Italy and within Germany *is less than* between the Italian and German Left and between the Italian and German Right (Berlusconi, Sarkozy and Merkel all belonged to the same party in Strasbourg!). The different political colours of Left and Right fade away when moving to Strasbourg. The colours of the national flag become predominant. Different views about the European policy options are no longer trans-national, nor are they expressed by way of trans-national political families as they appear on paper. Quite the contrary, the main political families tend to become the passive (complacent?) vehicle to engage an international battle for the death or life of the "national self" in Europe, which can only be disruptive for the future of the Union.

To begin with, revealing information is provided by a double-choice Eurobarometer opinion poll, eliciting a possible divergent opinion between how Europe as a whole, *vis-à-vis* the respondent's own country, behaves: "At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in the European Union / in your country?"¹. The top 'EU is right' countries are Bulgaria, Estonia, Romania, Croatia and Poland, all new accession countries with a possible "honey moon" effect. It is telling that the EZ as a whole ranks much lower than the No-EZ as a whole. Further, the top 'EU is wrong' countries are Greece, France, Cyprus, Italy, Austria, Spain and Finland, that is all EZ countries, so that under this dimension the EZ ranks higher than the No-EZ. It seems that the euro is a liability for the feelings towards Europe. The attitude towards the home country is more mixed geographically, but the EZ as a whole ranks lower than the No-EZ for positive judgement, and higher for negative judgement. Overall, these data suggest that the EZ is an area of bitter discontent *both* towards the EU *and* towards the home countries. Figure 2 provides a single snapshot of the country distribution along the four dimensions of the questionnaire, that is EU/Home, R/W, where R = right, W = wrong.

Figure 2



We have rearranged the data as follows. First we have selected the EU/Home dimensions; for each of the two we have computed the *difference* between respondents choosing R and W; hence a positive (negative) figure indicates the prevalence of R over W (of W over R) and *its intensity*. Then each country has been plotted on a spreadsheet divided into four quadrants. The EU-R/Home-R quadrant displays countries where the majority of respondents agrees with both EU and home country's policies. The popular feeling that they are mainly people in the "German block" is not contradicted by these data (except the remarkable case of Malta). At the opposite pole there is the EU-W/Home-W quadrant, that is people largely angry with both the EU and their home country. It comes with little surprise that these are mostly *EZ countries* (the most severely hit by the crisis and austerity, but not only) and the *EZ*

¹ Special Eurobarometer n. 415 "Europeans in 2014", July 2014. The complement to 100 corresponds to figures related to the other possible answers: "neither the one nor the other" and "don't know".

as a whole. The EU-R/Home-W quadrant instead hosts countries where Europe appears as a positive driver of the change of not-so-good home countries. This attitude is mostly expressed by *No-EZ residents in new access countries*. Finally the last quadrant with EU-W/Home-R seems less relevant quantitatively, with the no-surprise of the UK and the surprise(?) of Austria.

To gauge the relative dimension of these opinions, we present in Table 2 the size of the population of the four quadrants relative to the active population (age 15-64) of the EU and, for the relevant countries, of the EZ. As can be seen, the EU-W/H-W quadrant of (prevalent) global dissatisfaction hosts 42% of the EU population and a remarkable 61% of the EZ population, almost twice the population of (prevalent) global satisfaction. Europe is largely an angry continent.

Table 2

	EU-R/H-W	EU-R/H-R	EU-W/H-R	EU-W/H-W
% of EU population	17.9	23.8	16.4	41.9
% of EZ population	1.2	32.0	5.9	60.8

Politically, opinions and sentiments matter as they are translated into votes and, above all, seats in the Parliament. Hence we have also mapped the true electoral results of Table 1 on the four quadrants of Figure 2. The overlap is remarkable as can be seen in Figure 3. It is natural to think that the majority of people in the EU-R/H-R area are supportive of the current state of affairs and are voters for the *status quo*. Indeed, the CR/R parties got almost 50% of seats in this area. CL/L stopped at 45.7%, whereas NoE here had the worst performance. By contrast, the political implication of the EU-W/H-W area of global anger may be that here voters are ready to support major changes, but it is not so clear *which* changes and *where*. Actually, this area granted the majority of seats to the CL/L parties (42.9%), but also a conspicuous 17.5% to NoE and Others (NI). The most important and clear success (if not the single one) of a pro-Europe party, the Italian Democratic Party, is explainable with a wish to change the country, but, in the light of the location of Italy on the map, not so much in the way Europe dictates. Indeed, Matteo Renzi's campaign was based on the twin promise to change Italy and Europe. Likewise, the support in these countries for more power devolution to Europe (see e.g. Special Eurobarometer n. 413, "Future of Europe", March 2014) is traditionally the other side of the coin of the discontent with the home country, but it is not *ipso facto* approval for Europe as-it-is. This approval seems instead expressed by countries in the EU-R/H-W area, which is where the CR/R aggregation got the largest success (67.1%) at the expenses of all the others. In the EU-W/H-R area the two major aggregations broke even well below elsewhere (36.6%) and the NoE got their largest number of seats, though this is almost entirely due to the *exploit* of the UKIP in the UK elections. Finally, we saw above that the EZ as a whole is an area of discontent. As a matter of fact, the EZ assigned a more balanced share of seats to the CR/R (44.1%) and to the CL/L parties (42.8%), whereas the former got the absolute majority of seats in the No-EZ countries (54.1%).

So far these figures say that the CR/R parties won the EU Parliament in the EU-R/H-W and the EU-R/H-R areas, that is Germany and its historical North-Eastern satellites across EZ and no-EZ. But can these pro-Europe as-it-is areas be summed up? Do they live in, and do they approve the *same* Europe? In perspective, are countries in these two areas better EZ partners than the present ones? Maybe, or may be not if in the long run the costs of the Europe with the euro exceed the benefits of the Europe

without the euro (as some EZ citizens have perhaps come to believe). What about the present EZ? If there were an EZ Parliament, it would be different than the existing one, reflecting greater weight of supporters of changes in European policies and politics. Think of the Commission: its composition reflects the electoral results of the EU as whole, but the powers it exerts in the fiscal and monetary affairs are different for EZ and No-EZ citizens. If to some extent this *fact* is not acknowledged, the EZ citizens might start complain that their political will has been distorted by people living *outside* the EZ, which is indeed a different institutional entity in some key prerogatives of sovereignty. Therefore, our bitter conclusion is that Europe's economic crisis has degenerated into a political crisis, and it now threatens to further degenerate into a Great Divide across nations and peoples. Is anybody there thinking European?

Figure 3

