

European Parliamentary Elections: Threat for further Integration of EU

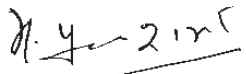
Poor electoral turnout with the rise of anti-establishment parties in the 28-nation European Parliamentary elections forewarns of a serious threat to the integrity of the European Union (EU) and the Eurozone, including the common currency Euro. Decline of cohesion in the EU would not only undermine the integrity of EU and the Eurozone, but shall also affect the economic recovery in the Eurozone and the place of growth outside the EU. Because, EU has largest share in the global trade and output. Lack of requisite engagement of people in the democratic institutions and processes in the polity of European Union reflect by poor voter turnout would also affect the efficacy of the European common institution like the European Central Bank and all other trade and economic fora of the European Union (EU). The lackluster voting percentage of mere 43.09% for the 751 seats of the European Parliamentary elections held from May 22-25, 2014, inspite of compulsory voting law in some of the European countries reflect the worst ever diffidence, pessimism and political disengagement in the fast ageing polity of Europe, notwithstanding a high per capita income and high level of education in the continent. Unprecedented increase in the seats and vote percentage of the Euroskeptic and separatist parties in the European Union elections may also endanger the survival of 18-nation Euro zone having the Euro as the common currency. If it happens it may spell a perpetuating spate of fateful events most likely to disintegrate the European monetary and banking union along with the fiscal discipline and all major economic policies. Widespread anti-EU protest votes for the European Parliament in the 2014 parliamentary elections are likely to make it harder for many European governments to pursue the ongoing deficit-cutting and structural economic reforms or to deepen the integration of the 18-nation euro area. Public skepticism about the fate of Eurozone and neopolitical resistance in Germany, the Europe's biggest economy, may also make it impossible for the European Central Bank to go beyond June first week's monetary easing.

In contrast to a divisive vote in the EU, the election results in India reflect an upbeat mood of the energized youth, reflected via higher voter turnout of 67 percent with a broader consensus for an integral and stronger center in these general elections is destined to place India, the third largest economy on the basis of purchasing power parity, in the forefront of the global polity of nations, even ahead of most of the major economic powers. Another contrast in the electoral outcomes between the twin elections in India and Europe is that the youthful voters in India have altogether rejected the parties playing divisive politics including the foreign funded AAP party leaders, supporting separatist politics in Kashmir. Though, still the centre right and center left, who stand for the unified European Union will control more than half of the 751 parliamentary seats. Yet, the anger against Brussels, the EU headquarters over austerity, mass unemployment and immigration was very prominent in this post-Eurozone crisis phase. Anger and apprehension of Islamisation of the Europe was also explicit in the Netherlands. Voters in the Netherlands were most vociferous against Islamic migrants, especially the Moroccans into Europe. They appeared quite scared of imminent Islamisation of the polity of Europe. The Dutch far-right 'Party for Freedom' leader Geert Wilders, known for his vociferous criticism of Islam has heclicly campaigned to end Muslim immigration to the Netherlands and to repatriate the Muslims currently living there. Though his saying that, "I don't hate Muslims, I hate Islam", raised many controversies as well. He was very apprehensive and vocal to the extent even to say in the Dutch Parliament that, "Islam is the Trojan Horse

in Europe. If we do not stop Islamification now, Eurobia and Netherabia will just be a matter of time." His party retains four seats in the EU parliament. The vote in favour of or against a unified Europe and Eurozone is an exclusive electoral prerogative of the people of Europe. But, non participation of more than fifty percent of the 400 million voters in the EU elections reflects an unhealthy disenchantment from the political process.

Though, in the Belgium and Luxembourg, which have the compulsory voting law the voter turnout was 90 percent. But, it was quite strange that in the two other countries having a similar law, it was less than 60 percent and 50 percent respectively in the Greece and Cyprus. Almost 15 countries, including the France had a voter turnout less than the continental average of 43.09 percent. The voter turnout has been readily and consistently falling since 1979 from 62 percent in the first election in 1979, after creation of the European parliament to 43% in the 2009 election. Even in this state of political diffidence commentators in Europe have been rejoicing at a 0.09 percent rise in voter turnout to 43.09 percent from an all time low of 43% in 2009 elections. However, inspite of disappointingly low participation rates in several countries, where the severity of the financial crisis led the voters to stay at home or register their abstention, higher than average participation in the larger member states has ensured a higher overall figure to take the average to 43.09 percent. Indeed, the countries that suffered the most from the Eurozone crisis turned up to the polls with force, where Greece, Ireland and Italy posted 57.4%, 51 % and 60% voter turnout. The marginal rise of 0.09 percent in poll turnout this year may not appear of much avail for the destiny of and integrity of European Union as the Euro-Sceptic, nationalist and separatist parties have made big gains across the Europe in these elections with anti-establishment or anti-European parties gaining support across the continent. France's Front National, Britain's UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party), the Danish People's Party and Syriza in Greece have topped in their country's EU parliamentary elections. The anti-establishment parties favouring dismembering of the EU have more than doubled their representation by harnessing a mood of anger with Brussels over austerity, mass unemployment and immigration in this post Eurozone crisis phase, can gain a stronger foothold in the 2019 elections for the European parliament. Elections are due in UK, and the UKIP can pose a serious challenge to Cameroon. If UKIP wins there, the UK may come out of the EU.

Inspite of the fact that the European Union leaders and the ECB have done enough to restore market confidence by equipping the euro zone with a financial rescue fund, stricter fiscal discipline, a single banking supervisor and a de facto lender of last resort. The rise of anti-European parties undermine the political will to complete economic and monetary integration, which already looks ever weaker, especially when it would require winning of public approval for changes to the EU's governing treaties. Fighting over the Eurozone debt crisis has already sown the seeds divisive politics domestically in most of the Eurozone member countries. The surge in support for Eurosceptic and anti-establishment parties in this May 25 vote would further reinforce inertia against any further austerity required to bail out the EU countries out of fiscal crisis. This would have repercussions for the global economy as well. Fast emergence of China, India, other BRICS members and Latin America, along with the rise of the pink tide of the new global left followed by successful installation of pro-left regimes in almost a dozen Latin American countries in last two decades are bound to unfold unprecedented economic and geopolitical surprises in the ensuing decades.


(Prof. Bhagwati Prakash Sharma)