

European Progressive Observatory 2023

Keep progressive and carry on Estonia, 5 March

On Sunday 5 March 2023, Estonians elected 101 members of the Riigikogu. A record level of turnout was noted, with almost half of voters using the possibility to cast their ballots ahead of voting day, and more than half participating via e-vote. To top up the list of breakthroughs, 30 women entered parliament as MPs – becoming the largest representation ever. The electoral win of EKRE – the party of nationalist, right-wing radical, frequently racist and pro-Russian rhetoric – which many pollsters had predicted, was prevented.

The Estonian Reform Party of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas obtained 31% of the vote, translating into 37 seats, which is more than any party has won before. Negotiations led to the establishment of a coalition government with three out of 12 ministries (Interior, Health and Regional Affairs) going to SDE – the Estonian Social Democrats led by Lauri Läänements.

Anneli Pärilin: “The overall voter participation was also record-breaking for Estonia. This time, 615,009 voters, or 63.7% of the electorate, have cast their votes. This high voter turnout can be explained by the polarisation in society. The liberal, as well as the conservative parties, did everything to mobilise their voters. Progressive parties won the majority, with 60 of the 101 seats in parliament. The winner was the liberal Reform Party of the ruling prime minister, Kaja Kallas, with 37 MPs, the highest number of seats ever achieved by a political party in the parliamentary history of Estonia”.

Jörgen Siil: “The Estonian elections were won by fear of another extreme-right coalition government, as had happened in the past, especially in times of war. The only party able to take advantage of this fear was the ruling Reform Party of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, who had proven to be a strong leader since Russia’s war in Ukraine started. A win for a single party is unprecedented in Estonian modern history. It can be explained by two factors: the fear of war; and, due to this, the fear of another government involving the populist, partly anti-Ukrainian, extreme-right and nationalist, even racist, Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE)”.

The return of the blue Finland, 2 April

The Finnish general elections saw the centre-right National Coalition take first place on the podium, with 20.8% and 48 seats out of 200. Just behind them was the Finns Party, 20.1% and 46 seats, which became a reason for great concern. SDP finished the race third, with 19.9% and 43 seats. Though the Social Democrats have improved their results by 2.2% compared to previous elections (which is almost unprecedented for the party leading the Finnish government), and they won the support of many young voters, this was not enough to keep the country on the progressive, reformist course. Especially since SDP's coalition partners noted considerable defeats. Consequently, SDP moved into opposition and the party's remarkable leader, Sanna Marin, who had been the youngest prime minister in the world's history and appreciated for her strong leadership in turbulent times, stepped down in autumn.

Kaisa Vatanen: "The recent election was the first one held since the war in Ukraine started, and also the first since Finland applied for NATO membership. It was not the first election since the pandemic (there were local elections in 2021 and regional in 2022), but rather the first one where the pandemic no longer affected campaigning. And it was also seen as a test of the popularity of the government's handling of the economy during several crises of the past mandate".

Tapio Raunio: "During the election campaign, Marin engaged in aggressive rhetoric against the centre-right National Coalition and the other parties of the right. Specifically, she argued that voting for SDP was the only way to prevent a victory for the political right. This did not go down well among the Greens and the Left Alliance, as media attention during the final campaign weeks focused very much on which party would finish first and thereby have the lead in forming the new government: the National Coalition, the Finns Party, or the Social Democrats. Other parties received much less media attention, with especially the Greens finding it difficult to get their message across. Marin's strategy probably increased the SDP's vote share but hurt the Greens and the Left Alliance. [...] What this implies for future cooperation between the left-wing parties remains to be seen, but it is safe to predict that the support for the Greens will increase again over the next few years – and this may happen at the expense of Social Democrats".

Is the fifth time a charm? Bulgaria, 2 April

On 2 April, Bulgarian voters went to the polls for the fifth time in just two years. This time it was GERB-SDS, reaching 25.39% and improving its score by two seats, who became a force, with 69 MPs in the 240 MP National Assembly. This translated into the bizarre comeback of Boyko Borisov, whose result was a particular blow to the 'protest party' PP-DB,

of Kiril Petkov. PP-DB ended second with 23.55% and noted a loss of nine seats. Last on the podium was the ultranationalist ‘Revival’ – whose anti-EU, anti-NATO and pro-Russian rhetoric convinced as many as 13.58% of the voters. The coalition ‘BSP for Bulgaria’ finished fifth, with 8.56% and 23 MPs.

Georgi Pirinski: “GERB, the party of former Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, having ruled for 12 years until 2021, was able to win, even though it had been, until recently, considered the epitome of corruption and nepotism. This means that Borissov personally and his party have, to a large extent, overcome this stigma of the past and now have a real chance to form a governing coalition – no small achievement, given the mass protests against them that brought them down in the summer of 2020”.

Lora Lyubenova: “Aside from the number of voters for the political winners, it needs to be considered that more than 100,000 voters ticked the option ‘I do not support anyone’ in these elections. In April 2021, this option was still only chosen by less than 50,000 voters. This increase indicates that the political perma-crisis pushes citizens to cast their votes to distance themselves from the political establishment. And another important fact is that the smallest party to pass the threshold, ‘There Is Such a People’ managed to convince fewer voters than those who chose not to support any party. This also means that voters who did not support any party could have a small political group inside the parliament”.

A labyrinth of unlikely outcomes Greece, 21 May

On Sunday 21 May, 300 new members of the Hellenic Parliament were elected. After a difficult campaign, which wasn’t free of scandals and smears, it was New Democracy (ND) of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis that collected 40.79% of the votes. It made the party break a pattern and be the first incumbent party in four decades to ensure such a victory. Still, it fell five seats short of reaching an outright majority. With no prospects for a coalition, it became apparent that the election would have to be repeated on 25 June.

Petroula Nteledimou: “On 21 May, the dilemma put to the Greek people was right or left, Mitsotakis or Tsipras. PASOK was only questioned as a potential coalition partner, on either side. Instead, the Greek Social Democrats maintained a position of their own, denying being the ‘filler’ in an artificial parliamentary majority. They proved to have chosen right, increasing percentage, but – what’s more – raising again esteem and support among voters. On 25 June, the dilemma will be a new one: who will be the alternative to the centre-right? Is the once-upon-a-time ‘left’ of Tsipras still able to veil its populism and extremism in the eyes of the Greek electorate?”

Vassilis Ntousas: “The election outcome dealt a powerful, potentially devastating, blow to SYRIZA, the main opposition party, and to Alexis Tsipras, its leader and former prime minister. The party failed to capitalise on the government’s flaws and inactions, with

its vote collapsing to just over 20%. [...] Tsipras appeared unable to revamp his and his party's tarnished image, creating a deficit of trust among swathes of the population, where their election manifesto could be a credible solution to the problems at hand. In the end, voters expressed a preference for ND's lustre of progress over SYRIZA's bleak reading of the moment Greece finds itself in: they wanted to put the crisis behind them, and SYRIZA failed to convince them it could do that".

Lefteris Antonopoulos: "Mixed messages by SYRIZA's leadership on the composition of a post-electoral coalition and PASOK's risk-averse and non-committed stance towards becoming a junior coalition partner to either of the two larger parties, was seized by the conservatives to cast doubt on the stability, coherence and effective governing capacity of a potential coalition involving opposition parties and tarnish the perception of credible alternatives. Adding to the common feature of Western democracies, hollowing out of party structures and the undercurrent 'centralisation' of Greek politics, the electoral campaigns served to further promote the image and role of the party leader against the influence of party structure as concomitant with the de facto reshaping of the prime minister's office as a quasi-presidential executive".

From the impossible to harder: A consolidated ND to lead in a fragmented Hellenic Parliament Greece, 25 June

In the repeated elections, New Democracy (ND) saw what many called 'unanticipated gains', whilst the previous leader on the Greek party scene – SYRIZA – noted a further decline, dropping from 20.1% in May to 17.8%. PASOK-KINAL gained an additional 0.4%, which its leader, Nikos Androulakis, put in the context of previous defeats, underlining that it's a 50% increase in comparison to the party's worst-ever result.

As it is often said, a month is a very long time in politics. And so, the new parliament reflected an even greater degree of fragmentation. It also included 12 MPs from the Spartans Party, rising from the foundations of the previous Golden Dawn party, and it managed to do so successfully in just three weeks. Among the other actors that entered were the communist KKE; the ultra-nationalist Greek Solution; the national-conservative NIKI and populist, leftist and anti-establishment Course of Freedom.

Dimitris Tsaouras: "From 1977 to 2023, Greece's party system was premised on a two-horse race, whereby victory for the mainstream centre-right party came at the expense of the centre-left, and vice versa. The distance between the two main contenders hardly ever reached double digits. This is no longer the case, as ND is a whopping 23 points ahead of its nearest rival. What is more, ND has won every single electoral contest since the spring of 2019 and has topped the polls in every voter survey since 2017. It is Greece's

predominant party. [...] Does this matter? Yes, because the rise of the predominant party is accompanied by fragmentation in parliament, reminiscent of the crisis years, and the absence of a large, solid opposition party able to challenge the government and appear as a credible, alternative government in waiting. Holding the government accountable can now prove difficult in the potential cacophony of a heterogeneous parliament, with important implications for the quality of Greek democracy”.

Loukas Tsoukalis: “Three things stand out in Greece’s two consecutive parliamentary elections held with little tension and high abstention: a personal triumph for Kyriakos Mitsotakis, leader of the centre-right party ND; the implosion of the radical-left party of SYRIZA; and the rise of the far right – albeit a fragmented one. The result will be a powerful prime minister leading a one-party government faced with a weak and divided opposition”.

A halted right, a hung parliament and hope for the centre-left Spain, 23 July

On Sunday 23 July, Spain went to vote in snap parliamentary elections. The decision to vote was taken by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, after a set of poor results in the local and regional elections on 28 May. The campaign that followed was vicious, and there was a gloomy prediction that Spain would join those EU member states that are governed by a right-radical right coalition.

The result was far from that. With a turnout of 66%, the outcomes indeed saw Partido Popular (PP) winning numerically, by gaining 33.1% and the largest number of seats (136) in the new Cortes. The gain was smaller than foretold, not to mention that the radicalisation of the PP and the prospects of forming the next cabinet with the far-right Vox was what Spanish voters clearly rejected: Vox went down from 52 to 33 seats. To that end, PSOE finished second, with 31.7%, rising by almost 4% in comparison with the previous elections and winning 121 MPs. Hence, four months of political detours later, the new government with Pedro Sánchez at the head was confirmed.

Lina Galvez: “A progressive coalition government led by PSOE’s leader, Pedro Sánchez, is the only viable option for governing in Spain. And in Europe, it is the dam that holds back the expansion of the far right. The defeat of the extreme right in Spain breaks a streak of success for the far right in Europe. Manfred Weber’s EPP strategy of convergence with the far right is not yielding the expected results. This leads to a balance in the EU that is once again in favour of pro-European forces: a Union led by Social Democrat chancellor Olaf Scholz; the liberal Emmanuel Macron; and now the Spanish Socialist Sánchez, who consolidates his weight and reputation – and that of social democracy – in Europe”.

Oriol Bartomeus: “PSOE, far from the bad omens of the polls, has managed to increase its seats in Congress to 122 from the previous 120 and, what is better, it has remained only

300,000 votes behind PP, a tiny 1.3% of the vote. Together with Sumar, the new party on the left of PSOE, they obtained 153 seats. Taken together, the government parties only lost five seats. But, unlike PP, PSOE can negotiate the support of other groups present in the chamber, groups that had already supported the left-wing government in the past legislature: the Basque nationalists of the left (EH Bildu) and right (PNV); and the centre-left Catalan independentists, ERC. Thus, even though it has not won the elections, PSOE has a better chance of forming a government than the winner, PP”.

Unai Gómez-Hernández: “So, what does this mean for the EU and European social democrats overall? The answer to the question has two underpinnings. The positive one reflects how social democracy has been triumphant against the radical right and hot-headed conservatives. In a rather plural and complex country such as Spain, only PSOE can be regarded as a truly national force that is significantly represented in all provinces without exception, including those with nationalist movements where the PP is largely absent. [...] The second underpinning has a sombre implication for the EU, and for liberal democracies as a whole. Despite the good results, the latest electoral campaign further advanced the trend that Global North societies have witnessed since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s: citizens are more detached than ever from politics”.

The growing complexity of the EU’s political landscape Slovakia, 1 October

On Sunday 1 October, Slovakia went to the polls, following the no-confidence vote against the coalition government led by ‘Ordinary People and Independent Personalities’. The campaign was intense and harsh, built on a debate around the implications of the multiple crises and the outgoing government’s incompetence in managing the situation on the eastern border with Ukraine. Soon after the campaign kicked in, it seemed that a political demarcation line fell to divide voters into two main camps – pro- and anti-former prime minister and leader of SMER, Robert Fico. In the end, the elections saw the largest turnout in 20 years (68.4%). Out of 150 seats, SMER-SD obtained 42 (with 23% of the votes), the neoliberal Progressive Slovakia 32 (18%) and HLAS-SD 27 (14.7%) – while the rest was divided between OĽaNO, KOH, SaS and SNS. This led to coalition talks, which quickly led to the establishment of a new, three-party government – with Robert Fico returning as prime minister and HLAS and SNS joining SMER-SD in the cabinet.

Brigita Schmögnerová: “Two of the results of the 2023 parliamentary election are undoubtedly positive: the electoral participation of 68.51%, the highest in the last 20 years, and the elimination of the two xenophobic, anti-European parties from parliament – Republika and the far-right party ĽSNS (‘People’s Party – Our Slovakia’). On the other side, a repeated absence of the Hungarian ethnic parties in the Slovak parliament sends several possible messages: it either signals the end of ethnic parties and a growing political participation of the Hungarian minority in non-ethnic politics; or signals internal tensions

within the political representation of the 600,000 Slovaks of Hungarian ethnicity. The most significant negative signal of the election results, however, is that none of the two potential coalition governments in their election manifestos made a strong commitment to a triple transition: an environmental transition, including energy transformation (well elaborated only in the program of PS); a digital transition, including transformation to an industry 4.0 and green industry; and a social transformation, focusing on an active social state also focussed on services of general interest”.

Robert Zanony: “It should not be surprising that a country feeling like a ship in a storm without a captain elects the strongest protector. However, one should not forget that there is no way to build a sustainable welfare state through culture wars, hate, fear, homophobia and xenophobia. People deserve solutions instead of shared anger. [...] There is an old saying in US-campaign vocabulary, stating ‘we campaign in poetry, we govern in prose’. Adapted to the Slovak parliamentary elections we could ask, ‘can you calm the country after setting it on fire, metaphorically speaking, with a campaign based on fear and hate?’”

Another slide to the right Luxembourg, 8 October

On Sunday 8 October, general elections were held in Luxembourg. The turnout was 87.18% and 60 new members of the Chamber of Deputies were elected. The Christian Social People’s Party (CSV) got 29.21% of support and an unchanged number of seats, 21. Luxembourg Socialist Workers’ Party (LSAP), which ran a campaign under the lead of Paulette Lenert, came second, gaining 18.91% and 11 seats (one more than in 2018). The elections also marked the collapse of the Greens (which dropped from nine to four seats) and the weak result of the Left (only two seats). The overall shift in the proportion of seats meant that the previous governmental coalition between social democrats, liberals and greens could not be repeated, leaving LSAP out of power for the first time since 2004. Nevertheless, its role will remain of crucial importance – remaining strong opposition to the new government formed by CSV and DP. In general, the outcome of this election represents a substantial weakening of the progressive camp. In that sense, the Luxembourgish sliding towards the right – especially with the ADR and Pirates gains (five and three seats, respectively) is another sign of a worrying trend.

Marc Angel: “The election results indicate a somewhat worrying shift towards the right. Even though the LSAP is strengthened, the massive losses of the Greens and the modest result of the Leftist party leave the progressive camp weakened to the detriment of the more liberal and conservative forces in the country. While any future government will remain staunchly pro-European, a possible coalition between Christian Democrats and Liberals could spell more stringency on budget and less flexibility on fiscal matters, a closer relationship with the business community, and a different approach to climate and migration issues”.

Poland is back! But where will it go from here? Poland, 15 October

The turnout was unprecedented, and some polling stations remained open until the next day to allow everyone queuing to vote. The results announced by the National Electoral Committee 48 hours later showed that the Law and Justice party (PiS) came first, with 35.38% of the votes and 194 seats. But it was the opposition that won: with Koalicja Obywatelska (KO, Civic Coalition) reaching 30.70% and winning 157 seats; Trzecia Droga (3D, the Third Way Coalition of Polska 2050 and the Polish People's Party) obtaining 14.40% of the votes and securing 65 seats; and finally with Nowa Lewica (NL, New Left) achieving 8.61% of the votes and 26 MPs. The last party to enter Sejm was the defeated Konfederacja, which, against initial expectations, ended with 7.16% and 18 seats and failed to become the disruptive force in the new setup. The opposition also won in the senate (here opposition parties stood together within the coalition 'Pakt Senacki' and common candidates across 100 majoritarian constituencies). As a result, PiS ended with only 34 senators. Last but not least, the referendum (that took place at the same time as the general elections) was boycotted: voters refused to take part and hence the 50% threshold for that vote to be valid was not reached.

Whilst there is a great sense of relief and much hope that this election will mark the end of the dark times, careful analyses of the results show a very divided and polarised society, which will need to be reintegrated for the change to last. The damage from the last eight years is massive and runs deep, which will make it hard to both recuperate and modernise with a speed that would correspond to popular expectations. The new coalition government, which features three political stakeholders – KO, 3D and NL (without Razem) – and is led by Donald Tusk, faces some immense tasks.

Marcin Duma: "One of the key factors that led to the democratic opposition – Civic Coalition, KO (EPP), Third Way, 3D (RE/EPP) and Left (S&D) winning a majority of 248 out of 460 seats in parliament – was the record voter turnout. The scale of citizen mobilisation was even greater than in 1989, when the first partially free elections were held and voters decided to remove the communists from power after 44 years of de facto dictatorship and dependence on the USSR. Nearly 75% of Poles took part in the elections. This turnout, compared with the average of the past 30 years, which was a little over 50%, is a sign of the impressive turnaround in civic attitudes that has taken place in recent years".

Anna Paczesniak: "While it was legal for PiS campaign contributions to be made by people employed by state-owned companies, thanks to their connections to the ruling party, it is difficult not to consider them a sign of political corruption. PiS used – as in previous campaigns – public media for crude propaganda and attacks on the opposition. [...] A few weeks before the election, women, especially young women, declared that they were hesitant to vote at all. The feeling of powerlessness when confronted with the ruling party, which has imposed a total ban on abortion and failed to respond to the huge

street protests of 2020, had translated into general disillusionment with politics. However, even more women than men attended the polls on election day. Frustration turned into action”.

Ireneusz Bil: “The election campaign that has just finished turned out to be the culmination of PiS’s efforts to utilise the image of the Polish Army and its soldiers for the purposes of political means. There was not a day without a press conference of the Minister of National Defence against the background of soldiers and equipment in military units. The minister’s statements were always of an extremely electoral nature. [...] From this perspective, with a war raging east of the Polish borders, reestablishing the constitutional place of the army and rebuilding a civic sense of mission within the force shall be seen as one of the most important tasks of the new democratic government”.

Aleksandra Iwanowska: “The record-high turnout of young voters is clear evidence of the Polish youth’s political engagement. It would only be fair that younger, newer faces are trusted and allowed to represent this huge chunk of the electorate that grew up during the lockdown, the abortion law protests or spending nights volunteering at the closest train station helping refugees from Ukraine. Because younger does not necessarily mean inexperienced”.

Business as usual? Switzerland, 22 October

On Sunday 22 October, Switzerland elected the new National Council and Council of States. The right-wing populist Swiss People’s Party performed strongly in the National Council, winning 62 seats out of 200 – and improving their position with an additional nine MPs. The Social Democrats ended second with 41 seats (two more than before). The main losers of this election were the Greens and the Green Liberals, who lost five seats each. In the Council of States, the Center Party won 15 out of 46 seats, while the Swiss People’s party and the Social Democrats retained their share of seats, six and nine, respectively.

The campaign evolved around the issues of migration, whereby the Swiss People’s Party embarked on a vicious and stigmatising narrative. The Social Democrats tried to change the terms, promoting the focus on household purchasing power and other relevant social issues. The final outcome shows some other trends observed elsewhere in Europe, including a strong divide between the urban and rural electorates.

Pascal Zwicky: “If we consider elections as a political moment in which the broad promotion of competing visions of the future is crucial, then the 2023 elections did not meet expectations. What could a desirable, just and democratic future in a post-carbon world look like? Such visions are being developed within the left. Still, they were absent from the election campaign also this year. The centrist parties (including the Green Liberals) are refusing to confront reality, and they are deceiving people (and likely themselves) by suggesting that we will somehow emerge from the mess we’re in through technology and

calm management of the status quo. Meanwhile, the SVP is accentuating its destructive course. On this dystopian path, we not only abandon the chance to mitigate climate change but also solidarity and democracy. Ultimately, it leads to fascist conditions”.

Sandro Liniger: “A new, identity-based line of conflict is restabilising the system: the socio-political line of conflict between openness, universalism and internationalism, on the one hand, and national-conservative traditions that need to be preserved, on the other. The question is, can such a polarised political system tackle today’s major challenges – climate change, social inequality, and public health? [...] On Sunday, FDP lost every seventh vote to the SVP, resulting in one of their worst results ever. The adoption of SVP statements and positions on migration by centre-right parties, but also by the dominant media, has generally led to a weakening of the taboo against the expression of anti-migration sentiment in the public sphere. The 2023 elections showed once again that when there is a lot of talk about the issues of the right (e.g. migration), the right wins.”

The Dutch voters out on an electoral hike Netherlands, 22 November

Since the exit polls were announced, there has been an avalanche of comments regarding the ‘shocking’ outcome, one which has also been called “the biggest political disruption” in the post-war period. Indeed, that the Party of Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders finished first, with almost 24% of the votes, and 37 of 150 seats in the Tweede Kamer – the Dutch lower house – is a very worrying result. Firstly, because in the opinion polls his party grew 11% in just the last two or three weeks of the campaign (which would suggest that Wilders managed to capture the undecided) and, secondly, because he managed to do so by articulating essentially racist, xenophobic, anti-Muslim, anti-migration and anti-EU sentiments. Additionally, his success is considered a strong signal reaffirming the upsurge of the anti-democratic forces across the EU. As a result, Groen-Links-PvdA ended second, with a score of 16%, a result very close to what opinion polls had predicted when the alliance was first launched, and with 25 seats – up eight seats compared to the two parties’ seats before the elections. The People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), neck-and-neck with GroenLinks-PvdA, ended just below that, with 15% and 24 seats. They did not benefit from being the incumbent prime minister’s party, nor from having chosen Dilan Yesilgöz – a woman of Turkish-Kurdish origin – as their candidate. If anything, their flirtation with the idea that they may enter a potential government with PVV fired back.

Agnes Jongerius: “In the last 20 years, Wilders has been advocating fear. And now, his campaign was suddenly based on *hope*. But hope is the narrative of Barack Obama; hope is the language of the progressive forces. This narrative used by the far right is a new development in this campaign. Also, the new conservative party, NSC, of former Christian Democrat Pieter Omtzigt hijacked the progressive narrative by making living standards a key message in their campaign. [...] It is, however, important to keep in mind

that our country did not change overnight. Discrimination has grown gradually over the last decades, and so has the polarisation of our society, as well as the fragmentation in our political landscape. What changed is that voters made a far-right party the biggest party in our national parliament. That the gap is more visible than ever does not mean it was not there before”.

André Krouwel, Roan Buma and Nick Martin: “The late surge in support for the PVV was due to the decision of the VVD to abandon the usual strategy employed against populist opponents: isolate and imitate. As mainstream right-wing parties have done across Europe, the VVD habitually made it clear to voters that the populists would not be a viable coalition partner, while, at the same time, they would adopt watered-down versions of the anti-immigrant stances of their populist challenger. However, only a few days before the 2023 elections, VVD leader Yesilgöz told voters that she did not rule out forming a coalition with Wilders, giving permission for right-wing voters to support the more radical – and authentic – anti-immigration version. [...] Dutch politics has transformed into a system where three political blocks compete. This three-way division between the populist, authoritarian and nativist right block; the Left-plus-Green block and the liberal centre/centre-right block is similar to the French situation in 2022. This shift in the balance between party blocks may be a precursor of what could become a dominant pattern in the European elections of 2024”.

Thijs Reuten: “The voters of far-right parties do not necessarily and entirely adhere to the radical anti-Islam and exclusionist views of leaders like Wilders. We can overcome this victory of the merchants of fear. To bring real solutions that work and restore the confidence lost in society and between citizens and politicians, we need a broad alliance with a strong progressive voice both in the Netherlands and Europe. It is time to break through the far-right populist narrative. Not by adopting it, but by inspiring people, by really taking on the fight for progressive ideals, for democracy and for a liveable planet. We are ready”.

Marene Elgershuizen: “There is no possible way to restore political trust if we do not call more than half of our constituency by its name: women. We have an international conservative backlash with, at its core, an attack on women’s rights. But despite this context, several progressive parties have failed to bring women’s rights verbatim to the forefront. [...] Yesilgöz easily moved her way to the top of the polls. Being of Turkish descent but nevertheless strict on migration, she was the typical hard-working and never-complaining woman, but never claimed to use her gender in her campaign – exactly how the right-wing Dutch like it – accustomed to brushing off accusations of blatant sexism as feminist nonsense”.

Ties Huis in ‘t Veld: “This is a task for all mainstream parties in Dutch politics, and indeed all over Europe, we need to stop the normalisation of extreme ideas in politics. While migration is a genuine concern of citizens that we must not underestimate, it should not legitimise politicians in just saying whatever comes to their mind. If it does happen, politicians of the traditional left *and* right should continuously call them out. No matter the occasion or how many times a phrase or term has been used”.

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