

After the electoral successes of Emmanuel Macron in France and Angela Merkel in Germany, two new political events defined the contours of the new political playground in Europe.

On the one hand, the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte (VVD) was able to form a coalition Government with three other parties in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the 31-year old leader of the Austrian People's Party (OVP), Sebastian Kurz, won the General elections in Austria.

The manifesto of the next Dutch Government comes under the title "Trust in the Future" and has sarcastically been defined by some Dutch newspapers as a "collage" of claims coming either from the Liberal D66 party, or the two Christian formations, CDA and CU. Anyhow, it took some 6 months to find a balance between the "economic" prerogatives of the VVD and the D66, on the one hand, and the "identitarian" claims of the CDU and the CU, on the other one.

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Out of the negotiations, the former obtained the simplification of the taxation scheme and greater flexibility on the job market. The latter could go back to their party bases with welfare measures targeting Dutch households and symbolic policies: allegedly, every 18 year-old citizen is set to receive a book on the history of the Netherlands. The parties agreed as well on rising levels of public investments in education, healthcare, infrastructures, security and defence.

The European policy stance of the future Government has never been much of a bone of contention over the past months. "Trust in the future" hinges upon the traditional Dutch position on EU reforms. Priority number one remains fostering the "stability of the Monetary Union" and the "fiscal responsibility of Member States". "Recent experiences damaged the credibility of budgetary rules [at the Eu level]", the manifesto says. Talking about concrete

proposals, if any, the Hague pushes for the introduction of a new “formal mechanism” aimed at backing the “European stability mechanism (ESM) in the restructuring of unsustainable sovereign debts”. Moreover, the new Executive is understood to reject any “step towards debt mutualisation” (read Eurobonds) or “financial transfers” (read European Unemployment scheme) among Member States. Likewise, the “development of a fiscal tool to absorb economic shocks across the Monetary Union” remains a taboo. Eventually, according to the manifesto, only Member States who “abide by the Stability and Growth Pact” should be fit for cohesion and structural funds.

Some thousand miles Southeast, in Vienna, Kurz campaigned on a conservative political platform to win the General elections on October 15. Over the past months, the charismatic 31 year-old leader has called for a new “style of politics”, that should “put citizens’ concerns first”, and be “bold” and “frugal” at the same time.

In the eyes of the new OVP, Austrian citizens are born “free”, “responsible” and “social”. Yet, at the European level, the party calls for the principle of “responsibility” to rule, full stop. No wonder than, that, like Rutte, even Kurz blasts the ideas of a European Social Union. The European integration process needs to be anchored to the value of subsidiarity and prioritise the development of the Single Market, Kurz’s manifesto said. In exchange, EU citizens should be given the possibility to directly elect the President of the European Commission. You must concede: it’s more than a Spitzenkandidat.

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As a matter of fact, after the elections of 2017, The Hague and Vienna share similar views on the priorities at the EU governance level. On the other hand, they always did when it came to set the objectives of the EU foreign policy: both sized down the prospects of Turkey entering the Union and called for a stricter immigration policy over the past years.

Yet, if we take a step back and look at the big picture, the recent political developments in Austria and the Netherlands signal that something is changing nevertheless in the European

balance of power: the core of the EU is shifting to the right.

The latter developments could have a direct effect on the relationship between France and Germany over a potential EU reform. In a sense, Merkel gained some allies: if it is true that the Dutch have always been closest allies in the economic management of the Union, Vienna is set for a comeback to orthodoxy, after Christian Kern's (former Chancellor and Social Democratic leader) Chancellery.

Off course, it's all for the better: both, Austria and the Netherlands (and thus Europe) faced the threat of radical right-wing forces gaining power. The populist beast has been tamed, so to speak (though many expect Kurz to strike an electoral deal with the Freedom Party, FPO, at the end of the day).

But both, Vienna and The Hagues, have always been two of the most "active Capitals" in shaping the governance and future of the Old Continent. It is fair to assume that the willingness of their leaders to continue to do so is independent from the - concrete or theoretical - influence of the far right.

As of now, we can only speculate about how the EU would look like if they could reform it on their own. But most likely, it would appear as a fortress for those at its borders, and as a fiscal cage for those inside of it.

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