

**Focus: Whither the EU?:
Domestic and Foreign Policy
after the European Parliament Elections (Summary)**

**Essay: The EU After the European Parliament Elections:
Can the Hollowing out of the EU's Center Be Overcome?**

Yoko Iwama (Professor of International Relations; Director, Strategic Studies Program [SSP]; Associate Director, Global Governance Program [G-Cube], National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies)

The 2024 European Parliament elections saw the European People's Party (EPP) become the largest party and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen be reelected, but overall the center-right to moderate-left parties lost seats while the far-right made headway. In both France and Germany, support rose for the far right, especially in the latter with the increasingly popular AfD. This has hollowed out the political leadership of the Franco-German axis, giving rise to concerns about negative impacts on EU integration. President von der Leyen needs to assume leadership of the EU while coordinating the interests of individual countries, but policy disagreements among the countries are becoming a problem. The influence of the new US administration is likely to be a major factor in the EU's future, and the far-right could gain momentum if a Trump administration takes office. Ultimately, the hollowing-out of the EU's center must be overcome by revamping the internal politics of Germany and France and restoring their leadership, but the time available to do so is limited.

**1 Is the EU becoming more inward-looking?:
The European Parliament Elections in 2024 and their Consequences**

Daisuke Ikemoto (Professor, Faculty of Law, Meiji Gakuin University)

The European Parliament elections of 2024 took place at a time of real internal and external troubles for the EU, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine posing a serious challenge to the European international order and the rise of populist parties upsetting democratic politics in many member states. As predicted, the right-wing populist parties gained strength in the elections while, among the major parties, the moderate right-wing European People's Party increased its seats, shifting the European Parliament to the right. However, the "grand coalition" of the three major parties – the European People's Party, the moderate left-wing Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and the centrist liberal force Renew Europe – was maintained, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was returned to office. As a result, the current state of the EU, including support for Ukraine, is not expected to be significantly affected. However, it is problematic from the perspective of democracy that citizens' political dissatisfaction is manifested in the form of the rise of right-wing populist forces, yet this is not reflected in the appointment of the key EU posts and policy decisions.

2 Where is Germany Headed After the Watershed (*Zeitenwende*) ?

Asako Takashima (Research Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs)

On February 27, 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared that Russia's invasion of Ukraine

marked a *Zeitenwende* (a watershed) signifying a major change in Germany's security environment, necessitating an increase in the country's defense budget and a review of its energy policy. However, the traffic light coalition government (the SPD, the Greens, and the FDP) required internal and external party coordination to implement its policies, and support for the government declined due to slow decision-making and inter-party rivalry. When the federal constitutional court ruled that the second supplementary budget for FY2021 violated the constitution in November 2023, the approval rate of the government plunged, and the European Parliament elections ended in a defeat for the ruling parties. At the national level, the CDU/CSU became the leading party, while the right-wing AfD gained enough support to become the second party. The AfD's breakthrough, especially in the eastern states, has attracted attention, and the future of the coalition government is uncertain; the AfD was expected to become the first party in the state parliamentary elections taking place in three eastern states in September, but a single-party majority was difficult to achieve, and it should be watched what kind of coalition will be formed. The results will also serve as a touchstone for the 2025 Bundestag election.

3 France Heading Toward a Post-Macron Era

Yoshiko Uehara (Professor, Department of Global and Intercultural Studies, Faculty of Global and Intercultural Studies, Ferris University)

In the 2024 European Parliament elections, a populist party won in France as in other countries. Faced with the growing power of the "far-right" National Rally, President Emmanuel Macron dissolved the National Assembly and called snap elections. To prevent the National Rally from gaining access to power, other political parties ranging from the left to the center cooperated each other in the elections such as through withdrawing candidates. The New Popular Front, an electoral coalition of left-wing parties, consequently won the elections, despite prospects of a "far-right" surge. However, none of these forces achieved the majority, and new parliament is polarized into a left-center-right triumvirate in which no party holds the majority. In appointing the prime minister, the president sought to form a coalition of centrist parties ranging from moderate left-wingers to right-wingers without "far-left" or "far-right" participation. Before the elections, Macron sought to achieve reforms such as the pension system with the president's executive power., however, in the current coalition politics negotiations and compromises are critically important as in Germany and Italy. Under such a political environment, achieving further reform is considered to be difficult.

4 The 2024 European Parliamentary Elections in the Visegrad Countries

Manabu Sengoku (Professor, Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University)

The purpose of this paper is to review the political trends in the four Eastern European countries comprising the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) before and after the June 2024 European Parliament elections. In general, these elections highlighted the rise of right-wing and far-right parties and the retreat of moderate forces but, in the case of the Visegrad countries, support for the EU was relatively high; pro-European parties gained some support, while support for Euroskeptic parties remained limited. However, there are some uncertainties that may affect future trends, including the prolonged Russian invasion of Ukraine, the realignment of right-wing and far-right parties in the European Parliament, and Hungary's assumption of the EU presidency in late 2024.

5 The 2024 European Parliamentary Elections and Sweden: Analysis and Future Prospect

Ken Shimizu (Part-time Lecturer, College of Law and Politics, Rikkyo University / Research Fellow, Rikkyo Institute for Global Urban Studies)

The main purpose of this paper is to present an overview of the process of Sweden's integration into the EU and to show that Sweden, once described as a "Reluctant European," has played an active role as an EU member since joining in 1995. The percentage of votes cast and the number of seats won by each party in the 2024 European Parliament elections, as well as the changes over time in the percentage of votes received, are then summarized and the trends therein identified. The main concerns of the European Parliament elections in Sweden, as seen from the polls, were (1) peace in Europe, (2) democracy, (3) the climate, (4) crime control, (5) the environment, (6) gender equality, (7) social welfare, (8) EU support for Ukraine, (9) energy and nuclear power, and (10) the economy. The election results boosted the share of votes gained by the Left Party and the Green Party, while the Sweden Democrats, who had never lost votes before, suffered a significant decline in their share. The main reason for this divergence was the difference between public opinion and the policies of the respective parties.