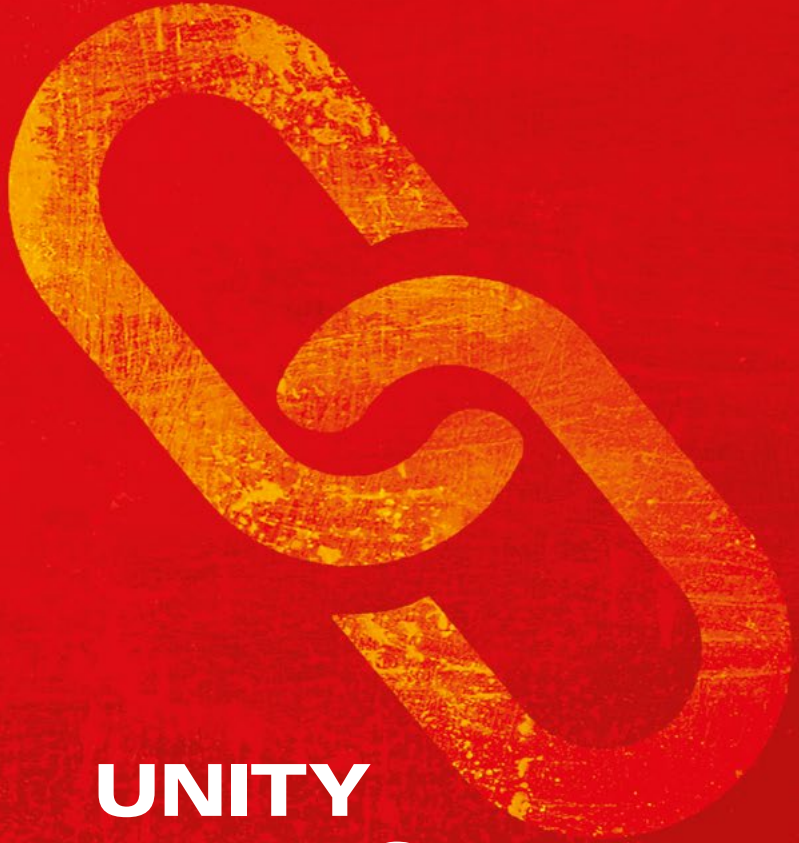


**ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG**  
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# **UNITY MAKES STRENGTH?**

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERSPECTIVES FOR  
THE FRENCH LEFT AND THE NUPES IN THE  
2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS**

## **AUTHOR**

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# ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a brief analysis of the current state of affairs in the European Union in order to analyse the perspectives of the French left and the NUPES in the 2024 European Parliament election. For these upcoming elections, we seek to understand what for EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS the strategic interests are in joining forces or competing alone.

**In the first part**, we show that a new political period can be identified in Europe from March 2020 onwards, with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine that began in February 2022 and which reinforced the economic and social crisis that was taking place in Europe. Legitimate criticisms have been made of the various national and European recovery plans put in place to deal with these crises. However, we argue that this new political cycle may open a (short) ‘window of opportunity’ for left-wing forces. Indeed, during this period, we show that certain principles associated with the left were briefly presented as solutions to these crises by the liberal hegemonic discourse that predominates in Europe (e.g. the (re)affirmation of the role of the welfare state; the need to abandon austerity logics).

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**In the second part**, we propose a comparative analysis of the political programmes and votes in the European Parliament of EÉLV, LFI, the PCF, and the PS. We show that on all policy issues, increasingly strong convergences can be identified, which led to the creation of a coalition between the four parties, the NUPES, and the establishment of a common programme for the 2022 French legislative elections. We also show that the divergences between them that are often highlighted by the mass media and the mainstream press – such as the position towards the EU and NATO – are reflected rather little in the voting behaviour of the different MEPs of EÉLV, LFI, and the PS in the European Parliament during the last legislature.

**In the third part**, we assess the prospects of the NUPES for the next European elections in 2024. We argue that, given the current tripartition of European party systems, an electoral alliance would be strategically desirable at the micro level (e.g. survival of the parties) and at the macro level (consolidation of a strong left-wing bloc capable of ‘storming heaven’) both in the short and long term.

# INTRODUCTION

In France, the question of the union of the left was at the heart of public debates in the year preceding the presidential election of April 2022. This union was widely sought by a large majority of left-wing voters,<sup>1</sup> which even led, in January 2022, to the organisation of the ‘People’s Primary’<sup>2</sup> by ‘independent’ activists in order to elect a common candidate for the entire left. Despite the will of the left-wing voters and this citizens’ initiative, at the end of the day, six left-wing parties (out of a total of twelve candidates) ran in the presidential election, among which *Europe Écologie les Verts* (Europe Ecology – The Greens, EÉLV), *La France insoumise* (Unbowed France, LFI), the *Parti communiste français* (French Communist Party, PCF), and the *Parti socialiste* (Socialist Party, PS). In the first round, Jean-Luc Mélenchon (LFI) obtained 21.95% of the votes and came in third place behind the centrist-liberal Emmanuel Macron (*La République en marche* [The Republic on the Move, LREM]) and the radical right represented by Marine Le Pen (*Rassemblement national* [National Rally, RN]). Although Mélenchon’s score was high and far above the forecasts of the polling institutions, the left was 400,000 votes short of reaching the second round of the presidential election. The re-election of Emmanuel Macron, and the collapse and failure of the other left-wing formations (e.g. 4.63% for Yannick Jadot [EÉLV]; 2.28% for Fabien Roussel [PCF]; 1.75% for Anne Hidalgo [PS]), created an awakening within the left, whose various forces started to consider that *unity could make strength*.

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In the space of a few weeks, what was previously described as impossible was achieved: the establishment of an electoral alliance for 2022 French legislative elections on the basis of a common programme comprising 650 proposals – largely built on LFI’s programme *L’Avenir en commun* (The Future

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1 See, for instance, ‘Les Français et la gauche dans la perspective de l’élection présidentielle’, IFOP for *Le Journal du dimanche*, November 2021. Available online: [www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/118614-Rapport.pdf](http://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/118614-Rapport.pdf) (Accessed: 20 May 2023).

2 It should be noted that this process was heavily criticised for several reasons among which having participated in dividing even further the left and involving candidates who had declared that they would not recognise the result and did not wish to take part in the process.

in Common) and which included the establishment of a Sixth Republic, the increase of the minimum wage to 1500 euros net, retirement at age of sixty, the freezing of prices of basic necessities, and ecological planning. On 7 May 2022, the leaders of EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS publicly presented this 'shared government programme' and the new coalition that would carry it, the *Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale* (New Ecological and Social People's Union, NUPES).<sup>3</sup> The objective presented by Jean-Luc Mélenchon to be 'elected' Prime Minister,<sup>4</sup> in order to impose a coalition government on the freshly elected liberal Macron, was not achieved. However, the success of this electoral alliance must be underlined. The NUPES came almost equal to LREM in the first round (26.16% and 25.80% respectively), came second in the second round behind LREM (32.64% and 38.63 % respectively),<sup>5</sup> obtained 151 seats in the National Assembly, prevented LREM from having an absolute majority, and presented itself as the lead opposition to the government. The constitution of a NUPES intergroup in the National Assembly and the recent common fight against the 2023 pension reform of Emmanuel Macron demonstrates that the coalition lives beyond a mere electoral alliance.

6 / This study aims to provide a brief analysis of the current state of affairs in the European Union (EU) in order to analyse the perspectives of the French left and the NUPES in the 2024 European Parliament election. For these upcoming elections, we seek to understand what the strategic interests are for EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS in joining forces or competing alone.

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3 Multilateral negotiations took place concerning the distribution of constituencies for the legislative elections, which resulted in 326 constituencies for LFI, 100 constituencies for the ecologist pole (of which 77 for EÉLV), 70 constituencies for the PS, 50 for the PCF.

4 Interview of Jean-Luc Mélenchon on BFMTV, by Bruce Toussaint, 19 April 2022. Available online: [www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/la-premiere-interview-de-jean-luc-melenchon-depuis-le-premier-tour-sur-bfmtv-en-integralite\\_VN-202204190615.html](http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/la-premiere-interview-de-jean-luc-melenchon-depuis-le-premier-tour-sur-bfmtv-en-integralite_VN-202204190615.html) (Accessed: 23 May 2023).

5 See: 'Les résultats des élections législatives 2022', Le Monde. Available online: [www.lemonde.fr/resultats-elections](http://www.lemonde.fr/resultats-elections) (Accessed: 9 June 2023).

**In the first part**, we show that a new political cycle can be identified in Europe from March 2020 onwards, with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine that began in February 2022 and which reinforced the economic and social crisis that was taking place in Europe. Legitimate criticisms have been made of the various national and European recovery plans put in place to deal with these crises. However, we argue that this new political cycle may open a (short) 'window of opportunity' for left-wing forces. Indeed, during this period, we show that certain principles associated with the left were briefly presented as solutions to these crises by the liberal hegemonic discourse that predominates in Europe (e.g. the (re)affirmation of the role of the welfare state; the need to get out of austerity logics).

**In the second part**, we propose a comparative analysis of the political programmes and votes in the European Parliament (EP) of EÉLV, LFI, the PCF, and the PS. We show that on all policy issues, increasingly strong convergences can be identified, which led to the creation of a coalition between the four parties, the NUPES, and the establishment of a common programme for the 2022 French legislative elections. We also show that the divergences between them that are often highlighted by the mass media and the mainstream press – such as the position towards the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – are reflected rather little in the votes of the different members of the European Parliament (MEPs) of EÉLV, LFI, and the PS in the European Parliament during the last legislature.

**In the third part**, we assess the prospects of the NUPES for the next European elections in 2024. We argue that, given the current tripartition of European party systems, an electoral alliance would be strategically desirable at the micro level (e.g. survival of the parties) and at the macro level (consolidation of a strong left-wing bloc capable of 'storming heaven') both in the short and long term.





**THE ENVIRONMENTAL,  
HEALTH, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL  
AND GEOPOLITICAL MULTI-CRISIS  
AS A 'WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY'  
FOR THE EUROPEAN LEFT?**



The growing awareness of climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic that started in March 2020, and the beginning of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, seem to have opened a first breach that could lead to a new political cycle in Europe. In the face of this new context, the EU and its member states have put in place many extraordinary measures to respond to the environmental, health, economic, social and geopolitical crises that Europe is going through. In this poly-crisis context, the implementation of the European Green Deal, the central role of European (welfare) states in containing the pandemic, the EU recovery plan and the temporary suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), the intervention on energy prices, and the taxes on some super-profits may suggest that changes can be made at the EU level. All these European plans are much less ambitious than what the left demanded and are still mainly based on market logic. However, the implementation of these extraordinary measures – despite the dominance of the centre-right European People’s Party Group in the European Parliament – has weakened the neoliberal *common sense* that prevailed, for instance, during the Eurozone crisis (or so-called the ‘European sovereign debt crisis’) and that led to the implementation of austerity policies across the European continent. This new context can be seen by left-wing actors as a key moment for the re-articulation of cultural hegemony around new principles defended by their party family, and as an opportunity to impose their narrative in the public space. However, this new context does not imply the end of austerity policies and the end of the prevalence of market logic (see, for example, the 2023 budget adopted by the German ‘traffic light’ coalition government). We argue that the window of opportunity for the left exists but remains narrow and should therefore be seized quickly.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, AND THE 'WORLD AFTER' COVID-19

In January 2020, the adoption of the European Green Deal by the EP was a first element that suggested a cultural victory for the left. Indeed, the plan proposed by the European Commission (EC) in December 2019, with the objective of reaching the neutrality of net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, adopted the lexical universe of the left in relation to the 'Green New Deal'. Since 2018, in the United States, the Green New Deal has become central to the discourse of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (left current of the Democratic Party), and has been defended, for example, in Spain, by the leaders of Podemos (We Can).<sup>6</sup> The European Green Deal includes (at least on paper) central demands of the left (e.g. new industrial climate and energy measures, circular economy plans, a forest strategy, climate neutrality). However, the limits of the appropriation of the lexicon of the left by liberal and right-wing forces must be underlined. Various European left-wing leaders have pointed out that the Green New Deal has failed to deliver the concrete changes that the EU needs to achieve its ambitious climate goals (e.g. breaking with free trade policies).

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The year 2020 was also marked by the implementation of public health measures on a global scale to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. Many intellectuals and left-wing personalities stressed that the Covid-19 crisis had shown the limits of neoliberalism, marking the 'return' of the welfare state in Europe. This health crisis would have shaken up the neoliberal hegemony and would have paved the way for the cultural victory of certain principles defended by the left, among which: the importance of the general interest before individual interests which was put forward by the public authorities; the importance of having robust public services; the preponderant role of the state and of the general interest taking precedence over before the interests of financial markets (e.g. a near-stop to the economy, the priority given to public health, the distinction between 'essential' and 'non-essential' services made by

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6 See, for instance: Interview of Txema Guijarro by Eoghan Gilmartin and Tommy Green, 'Podemos' Green New Deal', *Jacobin*, 28 April 2019. Available online: <https://jacobin.com/2019/04/podemos-green-new-deal-pablo-iglesias> (Accessed: 20 May 2023).

the state, the debate around TRIPS waiver for vaccines). French President Emmanuel Macron, for example, declared at the beginning of the pandemic that all financial means would be deployed to fight against Covid-19 to 'save lives whatever the cost'.<sup>7</sup>

At the EU level, in March 2020, the implementation of a solidarity mechanism between member states was put on the agenda – e.g. the debate about the possibility of mutualising European debts through corona bonds requested by nine member countries (including France) but opposed by the so-called 'frugal' countries, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, unlike during the 2008 socio-economic crisis and the subsequent Eurozone crisis, the member states and the EU have demonstrated their willingness to respond to the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic with recovery plans. The Stability Pact, adopted in June 1997 to ensure that Eurozone states avoid 'excessive' deficits (e.g. the deficit limit set at 3% and the debt limit at 60% of the GDP), was suspended and greater flexibility was introduced into the state aid rules so that Eurozone governments could cushion the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> The implementation of the 'Next Generation EU' plan in 2020 – the €750 billion EU-wide investment financing stimulus package – helped to fund national recovery packages. This 'unprecedented initiative in the history of European construction [...]' meant that for 'the first time [...] the EU went into debt for the member countries' in order to 'finance national budgetary policies between 2021 and 2027' (Barbier-Gauchard and Simon 2022). It has been analysed by the existing literature on European integration as a 'significant first step towards European financial and political unification, in sharp contrast to the misguided austerity programmes during the European sovereign debt crisis' (Picek 2020).

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- 7 Allocation of Emmanuel Macron, 12 March 2020. Available online: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=uSZFA0xLQsQ> (Accessed: 5 May 2023).
  - 8 See, for instance: David Adler, Jerome Roos, 'If coronavirus sinks the eurozone, the "frugal four" will be to blame', *The Guardian*, 31 March 2020. Available online: [www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/mar/31/solidarity-members-eurozone-coronavirus-dutch-coronabond](http://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/mar/31/solidarity-members-eurozone-coronavirus-dutch-coronabond) (Accessed: 10 May 2023).
  - 9 Some exceptions to the Stability Pact had already been made during the 2008 socio-economic crisis.

However, it should also be reiterated that many criticisms have been made by the different leaders and forces of the European left to the different EU recovery plans. They recalled that the cosmetic changes that we have just mentioned are a first step in the right direction, but that in practice the different plans remain guided by the same neo-liberal principles that direct the EU. These plans were considered, for instance, as a ‘pure communication operation’ by Jean-Luc Mélenchon,<sup>10</sup> they have been criticised because neoliberal counterparts (‘structural reforms’) have been asked of member states (e.g. the stimulus money was not fully delivered to Belgium because it had not ‘implemented rigorous pension reforms’)<sup>11</sup> and because big polluting companies managed to take advantage of European public subsidies and this directly contradicted the European Green Deal.<sup>12</sup>

## THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE ENERGY CRISIS

The return of war to Europe following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 on the orders of Vladimir Putin has also significantly changed the European political landscape. Against this backdrop, the suspension of the SGP has been extended. The ‘parenthesis’ of budgetary rigour (started in 2020 during the Covid-19 crisis) should continue until the end of 2023, but its return is planned for 2024, and initial discussions on its replacement show that increased flexibility will only serve to offset stronger and more systematic sanctions. However, it shows to what extent, in circumstances deemed

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10 Interview of Jean-Luc Mélenchon on BFMTV, 21 July 2020. Available online: [www.bfmtv.com/politique/la-france-insoumise/jean-luc-melenchon-le-plan-de-relance-de-l-ue-est-une-pure-operation-de-communication-d-emmanuel-macron\\_VN-202007210155](http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/la-france-insoumise/jean-luc-melenchon-le-plan-de-relance-de-l-ue-est-une-pure-operation-de-communication-d-emmanuel-macron_VN-202007210155) (Accessed: 10 May 2023).

11 See: Thomas Moller-Nielsen, “‘This is blackmail’: EU to delay recovery fund payment to Belgium over pension reform dispute”, *The Brussels Times*, 10 January 2023. Available online: [www.brusselstimes.com/349709/this-is-blackmail-eu-to-delay-recovery-fund-payment-to-belgium-over-pension-reform-dispute](http://www.brusselstimes.com/349709/this-is-blackmail-eu-to-delay-recovery-fund-payment-to-belgium-over-pension-reform-dispute) (Accessed: 9 June 2023).

12 See, for instance: Alfons Pérez, Nicola Scherer, ‘How big polluters are profiting from European public aid’, *OpenDemocracy*, 4 June 2020. Available online: [www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/how-big-polluters-are-profiting-european-public-aid](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/how-big-polluters-are-profiting-european-public-aid) (Accessed 6 May 2023).

exceptional, certain measures considered in the neoliberal *common sense* as demagogic can be implemented in times of crises.

In a context where health and geopolitical crises overlapped, EU member states had to deal with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, including the increase in gas and energy prices due in particular to the resumption of economic activities at world level after the lockdowns, and the anticipation by the markets of the drop in Russian gas deliveries. Between December 2020 and July 2022, energy prices in the EU increased drastically (from €101.7/MWh to €242.7/MWh for domestic industrial producer prices for energy; from €102.3/MWh to €157.8/MWh for consumer prices for electricity, gas and other fuels).<sup>13</sup> In September 2022, the EU announced its willingness to adopt measures to answer the crisis including the taxation on windfall profits of energy and fossil fuel companies. Although very limited in scope, this European tax was presented by the European Commission as a tool for redistributing profits to help the most deprived citizens facing inflation. This tax represented a cultural victory for the European left, which has been calling for a windfall tax for years. Member states have also individually adopted measures to limit and freeze gas and electricity tariffs (e.g. in France: limiting gas and electricity tariff increases to 15% in 2023, limiting electricity tariff increases to 4% in 2022 and freezing gas tariffs at their October 2021 level). On Monday 19 December 2022, the EU Energy Ministers of the twenty-seven EU member states agreed to cap the price of gas at €180/MWh in Europe from February 2023. For the left, this price cap, although still very high, is a first step forward as it represents a break with the European Commission's historical reluctance to intervene in the market. However, its ambition and objective can be questioned as it does not allow for a true redistribution of profits, nor does it put in place a real ceiling price. It should also be noted that it differs significantly from the recommendations of the Left group in the European Parliament.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Available online: [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/energy-prices-2021](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/energy-prices-2021) (Accessed: 5 May 2023).

14 Available online: <https://left.eu/issues/publications/the-lefts-proposal-for-a-new-energy-model-10-key-demands> (Accessed: 5 May 2023).

The failure of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) is another illustrative example of the profound changes affecting Europe. The ECT, which came into force in 1998 and involved some fifty countries including all EU members, allegedly allowed for cross-border cooperation in the energy sector. It ‘aims to ensure energy security through more open and competitive markets’.<sup>15</sup> The ECT has been widely criticised by scientific bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and by many environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly in relation to the possibility granted by the Treaty to multinationals to take governments to court for implementing environmental measures that they consider not to be in their interest, or because it does not respect the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015 (e.g. regarding fossil fuels). Studies have also shown that the ECT does not provide adequate protection for renewable energy investments.<sup>16</sup> In 2016, Italy withdrew from the ECT, and was followed in 2022 by other EU member states that announced their intention to leave the Treaty (e.g. France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, Netherlands and Poland). In February 2023, the European Commission called for a concerted EU withdrawal from the ECT, following a strong joint mobilisation of the Green/EFA (Greens–European Free Alliance), S&D (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) and GUE/NGL (The Left in the European Parliament). These European party groups, secured the adoption of an amendment calling for the EU to exit the TEC in a European Parliament resolution.

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Despite the strong criticism made by various left-wing and progressive political activists, leaders and organisations to the European recovery plan, the energy cap or the temporary nature of the suspension of the SGP, it should be noted that, since 2019, the (neoliberal) pillars of the EU have been called into

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15 ‘Le traité sur la Charte de l’énergie en six questions’, 26 October 2022, *Vie publique*. Available online: [www.vie-publique.fr/questions-reponses/286894-traite-sur-la-charte-de-lenergie-six-questions](http://www.vie-publique.fr/questions-reponses/286894-traite-sur-la-charte-de-lenergie-six-questions) (Accessed: 5 May 2023).

16 Lea Di Salvatore, Nathalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder, Lukas Schaugg, ‘Despite consensus on the ECT’s incompatibility with the global climate agenda, claims that it is well-suited for the clean energy transition persist’, *Investment Treaty News*, 08 October 2021. Available online: [www.iisd.org/itn/en/2021/10/08/malgre-le-consensus-quant-a-lincompatibilite-du-tce-avec-lagenda-climatique-mondial-les-arguments-selon-lesquels-il-est-approprie-pour-la-transition-vers-une-energie-propre-persiste-lea-di-salvatore-n](http://www.iisd.org/itn/en/2021/10/08/malgre-le-consensus-quant-a-lincompatibilite-du-tce-avec-lagenda-climatique-mondial-les-arguments-selon-lesquels-il-est-approprie-pour-la-transition-vers-une-energie-propre-persiste-lea-di-salvatore-n) (Accessed: 5 May 2023).



question. Ideas such as producing locally, buying European, no longer relying on imports for key sectors, protecting key European industries (in response to US individual retirement accounts [IRAs]), have been put forward by the European Commission. However, the reality of the EC's plan is, once again, much less ambitious than its promises, and many of the free trade agreements interrupted during the Covid are to be signed again in the coming months, or have already been signed (e.g. the EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement).

While the concrete changes that have taken place have not structurally transformed the EU and current policies tend to return to *business as usual*, these recent events start to highlight the flaws of the era of the race for economic growth at all costs, of the dogma of free trade, of market dominance and austerity policies. The various crises that have hit the world and Europe since March 2020 seem to have redrawn, at least partly, the neoliberal *common sense* and suggest that the principles of the left have won several ideological victories in the cultural battle being fought. This weakening of neoliberal dogma may pave the way for a further destabilisation of its principles. In this context, a favourable windows of opportunity for the left and progressive forces may open up which would allow them to consolidate their cultural victories, putting forward the need for real reforms capable of meeting the challenges of this new political time period.



# **WHAT KIND OF ALLIANCE IN THE LONG TERM?**

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE DIVERGENCES  
AND SIMILARITIES IN THE NATIONAL  
PROGRAMMES AND EUROPEAN VOTES  
OF EÉLV, LFI, THE PCF AND THE PS**

This new political timeframe that could benefit the left does not automatically imply that a programmatic alliance between the different left-wing forces is possible. For instance, in the French case, in February 2016, during the 2012–2017 five-year term of the socialist François Hollande (PS) – a period during which the PS became more ‘rightist’ (Lefebvre 2017) by turning towards neoliberal solutions – Manuel Valls, then prime minister, put forward the idea of ‘irreconcilable positions’<sup>17</sup> between the left parties, suggesting at the time that no convergence was possible between the ‘left of the left’ (represented by Jean-Luc Mélenchon) and the social democratic left in terms of programmes and values.

This second section aims to highlight, from a double diachronic and synchronic analysis, the points of convergence and divergence between the different programmes of the French communist (PCF), ‘radical’ (LFI), ecologist (EÉLV), and social-democratic (PS) lefts, in order to see whether these left and progressive forces have an interest in perpetuating the electoral alliance set up for the 2022 legislative elections or if genuine ‘irreconcilable positions’ make a long-term coalition impossible.

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Our analysis shows that over time, the party manifestos and election programmes of EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS increasingly converge on all dimensions analysed: international, European, economic, environmental, social, cultural. Furthermore, we have identified two key moments when these four parties moved further apart in programmatic terms, with a division between EÉLV and the PS on the one hand and LFI and the PS on the other: (1) **the 2005 Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE)**; (2) **the neoliberal presidency of François Hollande (2012-2017)**. We show that after the end of Hollande’s presidency, the positions of the four parties started to converge again. We argue that the establishment of a NUPES government programme for the 2022 parliamentary elections can be seen as a key moment that closes the parenthesis of the left’s internal division on European issues opened in 2005, and of (part of) the left’s ‘neoliberal turn’ taken by François Hollande.

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17 Meeting Manuel Valls, Évry, 15 February 2016. Available online: <https://dailymotion.com/video/x3sdo6b> (Accessed: 20 April 2023).

## **THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES' PROGRAMMES OVER TIME (2006-2019)**

This first sub-section proposes a longitudinal analysis of the evolution of the programmes of the four parties forming the NUPES alliance over time.

### **METHODOLOGY AND DATA USED IN THE LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS**

We used data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), whose experts assess the positioning of political parties in Europe public policy topics (described as 'items') – data from the 2006 (235 experts), 2010 (343 experts), 2014 (337 experts) and 2019 (421 experts) waves (Jolly et al. 2022). We looked at the programmes of ÉÉLV, the PCF and the PS from 2006-2019 and of the PG/LFI from 2014-2019, when their positioning started to be coded by CHES experts. We use the label 'PG/LFI' to design the Parti de gauche (Left Party, PG) and LFI as latter can be considered as a mutation of the PG, which 'changed its political line (and name)' (Tarragoni 2019: 329), and of which Jean-Luc Mélenchon was already the leader. We looked at twelve items, divided into main categories.

The first category 'European Union' assesses (1) the party's general orientation towards European integration; (2) the party's position on the EU's external and security policies; (3) the party's position on the European market.

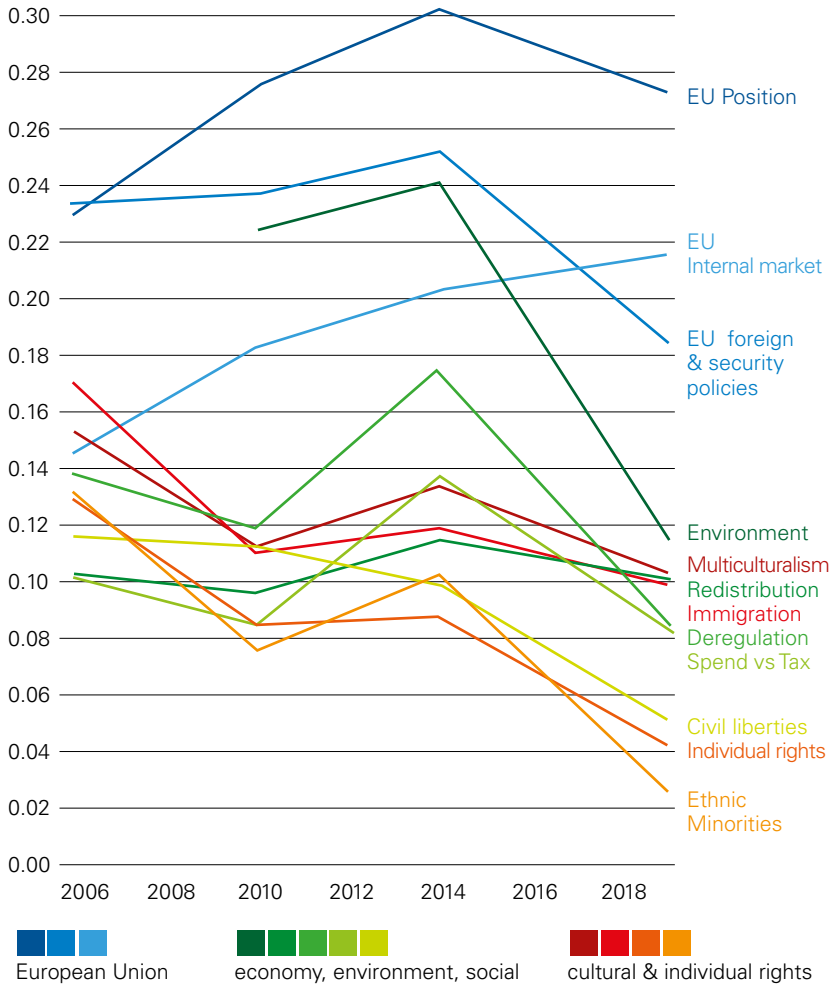
The second category 'economy, environment, social' assesses the party's position on (1) wealth redistribution; (2) environmental policies; (3) spending on public services and tax cuts; (4) market deregulation.

The third category 'cultural' assesses the party's position on (1) immigration policies; (2) multiculturalism; (3) civil liberties such as LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality; (4) ethnic minorities.

For each public policy issue, experts code the position taken by each party. This allows both to understand how the position of the parties evolves over time and to compare the position of the parties with each other. Since the scale varies according to the items that are coded, we recoded each of them so that their value was between 0 and 1. We seek to know whether over time the positions between the different parties have become closer or turned further apart. To do this, we calculated the standard deviation between the positions of the different parties for each item and for each survey wave: the closer this standard deviation is to zero, the more convergence there is in the positioning of the parties.

# STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE EVOLUTION OF PARTY POSITIONS FROM 2006 TO 2019 ON 12 ITEMS

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**Graph 1**

The closer the standard deviation is to zero (y-axis), the more convergence there is in the positioning of the parties. The further the standard deviation is from zero, the more divergence there is in the positioning of the parties.

The general longitudinal analysis, presented in Graph 1, allows us to make two observations. Firstly, **with regard to European issues, from 2006 to 2014 the three parties appear to be less and less close in their positioning on these issues.**

The 2005 vote on a European Constitution, marked an important event to understand the divisions of the French left around European issues: EÉLV and the PS were internally divided on this issue, while the PCF, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (who was still then a member of the PS) were opposed to it especially because of the neoliberal dimension of the EU which would acquire a constraining and legal value. Mélenchon was a member of the *Parti socialiste* for thirty-two years (1976–2008) and tried to influence the party towards a more leftist line over the last twenty years. In November 2008, he officially left the PS to create a more radical 'leftist' party, the *Parti de gauche* (PG). As Escalona and Vieira (2014: 69) point out, although 'the existence [...] of the PG' cannot be entirely explained by the European question, it has allowed Mélenchon and his entourage<sup>18</sup> 'to distance itself from the PS'. Most of the executives of the PS supported the Treaty, while Mélenchon, and most of the left-wing faction inside the PS, actively campaigned against it. The campaign against the TCE brought together not only the left wing of the PS but also other left-wing political parties, including the PCF led by Marie-George Buffet, the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (Revolutionary Communist League, LCR) and its spokesperson Olivier Besancenot, and the *Confédération paysanne* (Farmers' Confederation) led by José Bové. Mathieu (2015: 244) underlines that the campaign against TCE 'allowed the inclusion of the [Mélenchon] group in a multi-organisational political campaign competing with the PS'.

/ 23

Secondly, **the five-year term of François Hollande marked a second important break**, which further increased the divergences between the PS/EÉLV and LFI/PCF. This explains the peak of divergences observable on Graph 1 in 2014 on all categories (EU, economy, environment, social, culture). During this period, the 'rightist' and neoliberal turn of the PS reinforced the idea of 'two irreconcilable lefts'.

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18 Among whom were Alexis Corbière, François Delapierre, Raquel Garrido, and Charlotte Girard.

According to Mélenchon, the path taken by François Hollande and Ségolène Royal (PS candidate for the 2007 presidential election) was the same as the one taken by the US Democratic Party, and this 'US democratic orientation mark[ed] a break with the history of French socialism'.<sup>19</sup> In the 2012 presidential election, the PG and the PCF formed an electoral coalition, the *Front de gauche* (Left Front, FDG), and presented Jean-Luc Mélenchon as candidate. The 2012 election saw the triumph of the socialist candidate François Hollande, while Mélenchon received 11.10% of the votes and the EÉLV candidate, Eva Joly, 2.31%. EÉLV then joined the government set up under the presidency of François Hollande. EÉLV ended up weakened after its participation in PS governments, associating the greens with neoliberal policies (notably austerity policies, deregulation of labour markets, pension reform) and a lack of environmental ambitions. In the 2017 presidential election, Jean-Luc Mélenchon received 19.58% of the votes in 2017 while the socialist candidate, Benoît Hamon, supported by the greens, obtained only 6.36%.

The peak of divergence between the four parties was reached in 2014, halfway through François Hollande's term in office, and began to decrease from then on given the growing internal divisions within the Socialist Party. From 2014, we can, for instance, observe a growing convergence on European issues, especially on foreign and security policies but also on the general position towards the EU. There is a tendency for LFI and the PCF to be more in favour of the current European integration, which brings them closer to the positions of EÉLV and the PS, that are, on their part becoming progressively more critical on the current EU neoliberal policies (see pages 28 – 43 & 43 – 49).

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19 According to Mélenchon, the origin of the ideological shift of PS towards neoliberalism and a 'democratic post-left' position can be traced to the mid-1980s, in one particular text written by François Hollande, *Pour être modernes, soyons démocrates* (To be modern, let's be democrats).

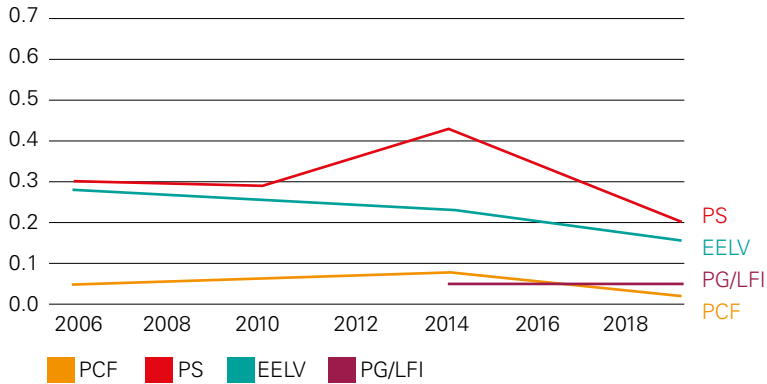


On economic, environmental and social issues, the data also shows that the positions of the four parties tend to converge over time. The example of market deregulation is revealing.

Graph 2 below shows the general positioning of the parties on this issue, with 0 corresponding to 'strongly opposed', and 1 to 'strongly in favour' of deregulation. On this issue, after the Hollande quinquennium, one can observe a 'turn to the left' of EÉLV and the PS whose positions tend to be closer to that of the PCF and the PG/LFI. The greens and the social-democratic lefts have since then adopted a more state-interventionist position.

The graph 3 shows the general positioning of the parties on environmental issue, with 0 corresponding to 'strongly in favour' of implementing environmental policies (despite the economic costs of such measures) to 1 'strongly in favour' of measures to improve economic growth (despite the environmental costs). On this issue, the four members of the NUPES came closer together between 2014 and 2019. The PCF and the PS adopt, over time, much more environmentalist positions. We can hypothesise that to a certain extent the appearance of the *Parti de gauche* in 2009 as a new radical left and pro-environmental political actor has led to a greater convergence of all the parties on these issues.

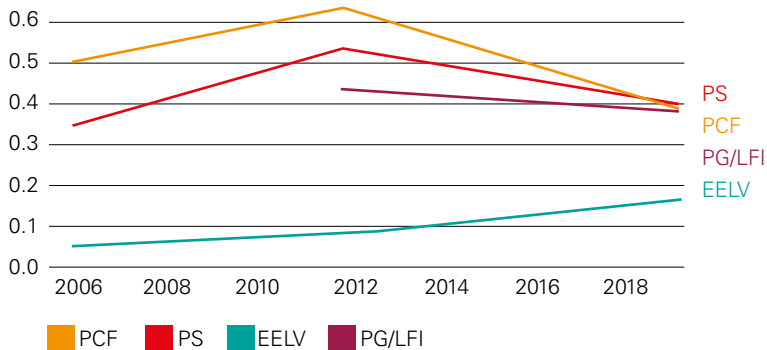
## MARKET DEREGULATION



**Graph 2**

The closer the party position is to 0 (y-axis), the more the parties are strongly opposed to deregulation.

## ENVIRONMENT



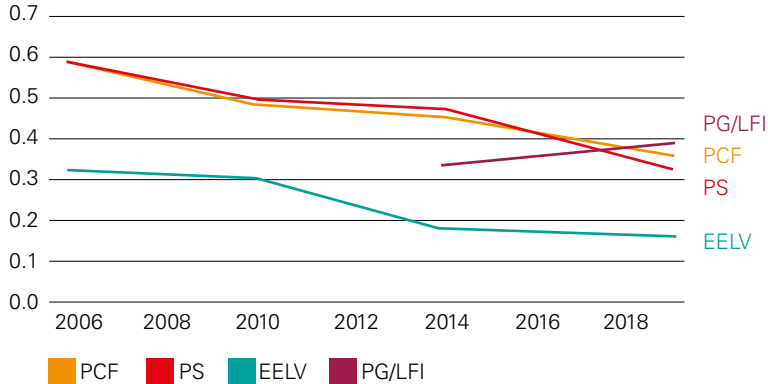
**Graph 3**

The closer the party position is to 0 (y-axis), the more the parties are strongly in favour of implementing environmental policies despite the economic costs of such measures.

The positions of the four parties on issues related to the 'cultural' category also became closer in time. This trend can be seen, for example, when looking at the issue of multiculturalism.

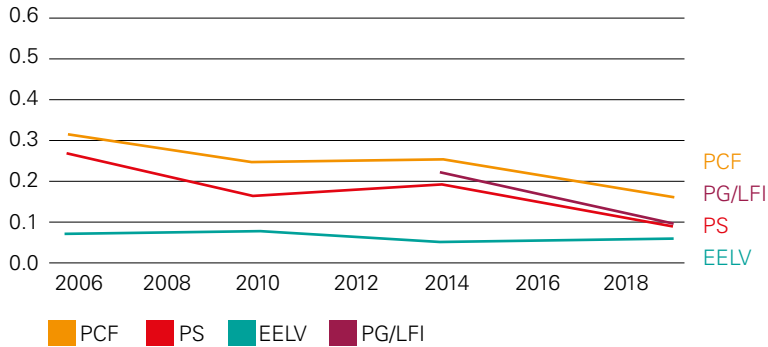
Graph 4 below shows how the parties perceive it, from 0 'strongly in favour of multiculturalism' to 1 'strongly in favour of assimilation'. The graph 5 shows a very strong convergence of the different components of NUPES around issues related to gay rights and gender equality: 0 corresponds to 'strongly in favour of liberal policies', and 1 to 'strongly opposed to liberal policies'.

**MULTICULTURALISM**



**Graph 4**  
The closer the party position is to 0 (y-axis), the more the parties are strongly in favour of multiculturalism.

**INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS**



**Graph 5**  
The closer the party position is to 0 (y-axis), the more the parties are strongly in favour of liberal policies regarding social lifestyle.

To summarise, we have been able to identify a growing convergence of the programmes of the different French left-wing and progressive forces over time. The period 2005–2017 was marked by strong divergences between EÉLV/PS and LFI/PCF, due to their different positioning regarding the TCE and the economic policies implemented under François Hollande’s term. Since then, there has been a realignment of their programmes, which we will now examine more in detail.

## **COMPARISON OF PROGRAMMES FOR THE 2022 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS**

This second sub-section provides a qualitative analysis of the programmes of the four NUPES members in the 2022 presidential and legislative elections. We show that the evolution identified above towards a greater convergence of the positioning of the parties over time culminated in 2022.

### **THE 2022 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

In the run-up to the 2022 presidential election, the fragmented left presented six candidates, reducing its chances to reach the second round. Jean-Luc Mélenchon was the first to mention his candidacy, as early as November 2020, and confirmed it later after more than 150,000 citizens gave him their (online) support. In 2017, LFI surprised the French public opinion by obtaining 19.58% of the votes, and in 2022, Mélenchon’s ambition was to confirm his hegemony on the left and to embody the ‘popular pole’, by running under the banner of the *Union populaire* (Popular Union, UP). He also hoped to reach the second round by increasing his 2017 score, which had been described by many commentators as his ‘glass ceiling’.

For EÉLV, the PCF and the PS, 2022 was a key date for the survival of their organisations. The PCF had not presented a candidate of its own since 2007 as the party supported Mélenchon in 2012 and in 2017. The PS had only obtained 6.36% of the votes in the 2017 presidential election; while EÉLV did not present a candidate in 2017 and supported the candidacy of Benoît Hamon (PS). For the 2022 presidential election, the main objective of the PCF and the PS was, therefore to preserve their partisan apparatus thanks to the candidacies of Fabien Roussel (PCF) and Anne Hidalgo (PS). The greens also

decided – partly because of the satisfactory results they obtained in the 2019 European and 2020–2021 local intermediate elections – to present their own candidate, Yannick Jadot. While Mélenchon was leading in the polls during the 2022 electoral campaign, the three other candidates adopted ‘differentiation strategies’ in order to distinguish themselves from LFI: a nationalist, secular and working-class left for the PCF; a ‘moderate’ left for the PS; and a rather ‘centrist’ political ecology for EÉLV.

Despite the differences that were put forward by the candidates themselves in their narratives during the electoral campaign, our analysis shows, in fact, a strong proximity in the programmes of the four parties. Despite some divergences, one can note a high degree of convergence between the four presidential candidates who all showed their willingness to defend a strong welfare state and a redistribution of wealth, to put democracy at the centre of their programmes by proposing more participatory and direct democracy measures, and to advocate progressive and liberal policies on cultural and societal issues. Regarding their ecological programmes, even though some differences can be noticed between their different proposals (e.g. on nuclear power), all four parties present an ambitious programme to address the environmental crisis. On European policies, despite some divergences, all parties aim to put an end to the EU of economic and fiscal austerity, aiming at environmentally and economically fair Europe.

## > NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Regarding economic and social welfare policies, the four programmes defended an increase in the minimum wage;<sup>20</sup> the construction of social housing;<sup>21</sup> the repeal of Emmanuel Macron's unemployment insurance reform, and a general increase in wages. The four parties also advocated a reduction of the legal working time by different means,<sup>22</sup> and each party defended the implementation of new minimal social standards.<sup>23</sup> The four parties also converged regarding the French wealth tax, called *Impôt de solidarité sur la fortune* (Solidarity tax on wealth, ISF). The PS and EÉLV proposed the introduction of a 'environmental ISF', while LFI and the PCF wanted to restore and reinforce the ISF suppressed in 2018 under the presidency of Emmanuel Macron (in LFI's case including an environmental component in the ISF).

The four parties also planned to pursue education policies that prioritise the recruitment of teachers and the increase of their salaries. Concerning health policies, the candidates proposed: a revalorisation of health professions (by salary increases), to get out of the 'hospital-business' (*hôpital-entreprise*) logic which introduces a competitive, managerial, and entrepreneurial culture in the organisation of the hospital;<sup>24</sup> to de-conjugalise the *allocation aux adultes handicapés* (disabled adults' allowance, AAH); to recognise burn-out as an occupational disease (EÉLV, LFI, PS) and to legalise euthanasia. In the context

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20 1400 euros net for LFI, 1500 euros net for the PCF and EÉLV, and an increase of 200 euros net for the PS.

21 700,000 by 2027 for EÉLV, 200,000 per year for five years for LFI, 150,000 per year for the PS, and the application of the law on solidarity and urban renewal [SRU] for the PCF.

22 EÉLV's programme did not specify the exact duration of this reduction, the PS wanted to 'encourage' this reduction without imposing it, while the PCF proposed to lower the weekly working time to 32 hours, and LFI wanted to do the same for workers carrying out heavy work.

23 Such as, for instance, the creation of a *revenu citoyen* (citizen's income) for EÉLV, the introduction of an 'autonomy guarantee' for young people detached from the parental tax household (1063 euros) for LFI, the creation of a 'youth minimum' for the PS, and the opening of the *revenu de solidarité active* (active solidarity income, RSA) to the under-25s for the PCF.

24 E.g. by leaving, totally or partially in salaries, the activity-based payment model.

of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, the four candidates also declared themselves in favour of lifting the patents on vaccines.

Differences could be noted on two points: the question of retirement age and retirement pensions. On the one hand, the PS and EÉLV did not want to modify the retirement age – although the PS wanted to ‘cap it at the current 62 years old’ in order to ‘safeguard’ this right.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, LFI and the PCF wanted to restore the full retirement age to 60. The PS and EÉLV also defended lower minimum pension amounts<sup>26</sup> than LFI and the PCF.<sup>27</sup>

**When it comes to institutional reforms**, strong similarities between the propositions of the four candidates can be noted among which the implementation of participatory and direct democracy mechanisms such as: the *référendum d’initiative citoyenne*<sup>28</sup> (Citizens’ initiative referendum, RIC) which was the main demand of the 2018-2019 Yellow Vests movement (Gonthier and Guerra 2022); the introduction of proportional voting for legislative elections; and the introduction of the right to vote at 16 which is included in the programmes of the EÉLV, LFI and the PS. A difference can be noted on the question of the Fifth Republic: both LFI and the PCF denounced the ‘presidential monarchy’, but only LFI defended the establishment of a Sixth Republic, which aims to be a ‘stable parliamentary regime’, and which would be set up following the convocation of a Constituent Assembly (composed of elected representatives and citizens chosen by lot) and an approval referendum.<sup>29</sup>

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25 2022 PS programme. Available online: [https://2022avechidalgo.fr/notre\\_programme](https://2022avechidalgo.fr/notre_programme) (Accessed: 20 April 2023).

26 Respectively a minimum pension of 1063 euros per month, and an increase of the minimum pension to 1000 euros net per month.

27 Respectively 1400 euros net per month, and 1200 euros net per month.

28 E.g. For EÉLV, the RIC would allow ‘to propose a law or an amendment will have to be supported by 900,000 signatures’ and there would be the establishment of an ‘abrogative or constitutional [RIC that] will have to be supported by 1,800,000 signatures’; for LFI, the RIC would make it possible to ‘remove elected officials from office, propose or repeal a law and amend the Constitution’; for the PCF, the ‘right to petition will allow 500,000 citizens to have a law proposal placed on the agenda of the Assemblies’.

29 2022 LFI programme. Available online: <https://melenchon2022.fr/plans/6e-republique> (Accessed: 20 April 2023).

**Regarding cultural and societal policies**, a great convergence can be observed between the four political programmes: whether it is for the legalisation of cannabis (EÉLV and LFI) or the setting up of a debate on its legalisation (PCF and PS), or the plurality of the media (the four programmes proposed to legislate against media concentration). Concerning abortion, the four candidates defended the need to ensure the right to the *interruption volontaire de grossesse* (voluntary interruption of pregnancy, IVG). Differences can be noted regarding the extension of the right to assisted reproductive technology (ART) to transsexual people, that is included only in the programmes of LFI, the PCF and EÉLV, or surrogacy which should not be legalised for LFI, the PCF and the PS, whereas Yannick Jadot defended an ‘ethical GPA’ (*gestation pour autrui*)<sup>30</sup> – although it is not in EÉLV’s programme.

**On environmental policies**, the four presidential candidates converged on many points, including the reduction of pesticides;<sup>31</sup> the implementation of plans for the renovation of housing; the objective of lowering greenhouse gas emissions; the revival of the small railway lines; the protection of animal welfare;<sup>32</sup> and the protection of biodiversity.<sup>33</sup> One point of friction concerned the nuclear issue: while EÉLV and LFI proposed to plan a nuclear phase-out, the PCF proposes a ‘nuclear and renewable energy mix to ensure [the] sovereignty’ of France,<sup>34</sup> and the PS wanted to use ‘nuclear power [...] as a transitional energy, without a precipitous exit’.<sup>35</sup> Other divergences are also to

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30 Programme EÉLV elections 2022. Available online: <https://eelv.fr/files/2021/10/Projet-2022-11.07.21-NP-1.pdf> (Accessed: 9 June 2023).

31 Banning pesticides such as neonicotinoids and ending the use of glyphosate for EÉLV, LFI and the PS, and the creation of a ‘European agency for the approval of natural alternatives to pesticides and insecticides’ for the PCF

32 E.g. the creation of a ministry of ‘animal condition’ for EÉLV, the banning of factory farms for LFI, the objective of ‘preventing the development of industrial breeding facilities’ for the PCF, the launch of the *Assises du bien-être animal* [Animal Welfare Conferences] for the PS.

33 E.g. the recognition of ecocide as a crime for EÉLV, LFI and the PS; the registration of maritime surfaces as ‘common property’ for LFI and the PCF.

34 2022 PCF programme. Available online: [www.fabienroussel2022.fr/le\\_programme](http://www.fabienroussel2022.fr/le_programme) (Accessed: 20 April 2023).

35 2022 PS programme, op. cit.



be noted such as the one on hunting, only EÉLV and LFI proposed to ban it during weekends and school holidays.

It should also be highlighted that environmental issues were less prominent in Fabien Roussel's programme,<sup>36</sup> demonstrated, for instance, by absence of information concerning certain programmatic points such as wind turbines (while EÉLV, LFI and the PS defended their development). It is also relevant to recall that the importance of environmental issues in LFI's manifesto was welcomed by several environmental NGOs. Some of the main French environmental organisations (e.g. *Greenpeace France*, *Réseau Action Climat* [Climate Action Network], *L'Affaire du siècle* [The Case of the Century]), which assessed the presidential candidates on their green commitments, ranked Mélenchon equally in the lead with the EÉLV candidate Yannick Jadot. LFI relies on the concept of 'popular environmentalism' to structure its ecological program. This concept was theorised by Jean-Luc Mélenchon who explicitly opposes the 'people' (the main actor of the ecological transition, and the victim of climate change) to the 'elite' (responsible for pollution, e.g. 'unscrupulous billionaires who dream of making space their new playground')<sup>37</sup>. According to Mélenchon 'in the battle for the survival of an ecosystem compatible with human life, there is a confrontation between the people and the oligarchy'.<sup>38</sup>

**Regarding international policies**, divergences are to be underlined among which are the question of NATO enlargement and the war in Ukraine. LFI and the PCF's programmes proposed an exit from NATO, while the PS and EÉLV wanted to remain within the organisation – although EÉLV's programme specified that it aimed to develop 'a strengthened Europe of defence and a more balanced transatlantic partnership'.<sup>39</sup> Differences are also observable in

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36 Poliverse. Available online: <https://poliverse.fr/program> (Accessed: 15 April 2023).

37 Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of La France insoumise, meeting in Corbeille-Essonnes, 15 November 2018. Available online: <https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/2018/11/14/en-direct-meeting-de-jean-luc-melenchon-et-farida-amrani-a-corbeille-essonnes> (Accessed: 15 April 2023).

38 Available online: <https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/2018/11/14/en-direct-meeting-de-jean-luc-melenchon-et-farida-amrani-a-corbeille-essonnes> (Accessed: 15 April 2023).

39 2022 EÉLV programme, op. cit.

the positions of the four candidates in relation to Russia's military aggression of Ukraine, such as on the kind of military equipment to be sent to Ukraine and the imposition of an embargo on Russian oil and gas defended by EÉLV and the PS but not by LFI and the PCF. However, in the European Parliament, LFI voted to lower the supply of Russian oil and gas and to develop alternative sources of energy (see pages 43 – 49).

Concerning **migration policies**, the four candidates insisted on the need to provide a more supportive and dignified treatment to asylum seekers. Nonetheless, while EÉLV, the PCF and LFI planned to suspend the Dublin Regulation, the PS aimed to reform 'the Dublin system to ensure efficient procedures and a dignified reception of people [a] system [that] will be based on solidarity between member states'.<sup>40</sup> Regarding the issue of the 'access' to French nationality, EÉLV and the PS did not plan to make significant changes to the current rules, while LFI and the PCF called for the regularisation of undocumented workers.

## > EUROPEAN ISSUES

**With regard to European integration**, despite what is often put forward by the mass media and the mainstream press, our analysis shows strong points of convergence in the programmes of the four parties. It is true that, at first sight, the four parties seem to have a different relationship to the EU: LFI and the PCF aim to set up a process of rupture with the current European treaties and a modification of the European rules, whereas EÉLV defends a ‘federal Europe’ and for the PS, ‘Europe is the instrument of [...] French sovereignty’.<sup>41</sup> However, we argue that an overly strong opposition between ‘Eurocritical’ parties (LFI/PCF) and ‘pro-European’ parties (EÉLV/PS) would in fact be reductive, and would not allow for an understanding of the concrete relations that the different parties maintain in the context of the EU.

On the one hand, the trend we identified in the first section of a growing convergence of the four parties on European issues until 2019 (see Graph 1) is confirmed by our qualitative analysis of the 2022 presidential election. One example is the significant change in LFI’s programme regarding European policies. In the 2017 programme, LFI advocated a two-phase plan: (1) Plan A: a concerted exit of the European treaties and their re-negotiation; (2) Plan B: a unilateral exit of the European treaties. In 2022, the ‘Plan B’ was modified to: ‘we will in any case immediately apply our programme at national level by taking on the confrontation with the European institutions’.<sup>42</sup>

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On the other hand, all four parties are, even though not equally, committed to challenging the neo-liberal rules of the EU, and all aim to change the EU to meet economic, social, democratic and environmental challenges. The four parties are therefore fighting common battles with different means, among which we can mention: an agreement to change the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a change in the energy market, an end to austerity policies and the lifting of patents on vaccines. The lexical universe used and the solutions advocated by the parties may differ, but the overall objectives remains the same. To achieve this objectives:

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41 2022 PS programme, op. cit.

42 2022 LFI programme, op. cit.

1. LFI underlined its willingness to disobey European rules when they are not compatible with the programme on which the party was elected, for instance through the opt-out clause. More precisely the party aimed to disobey regarding at least nine European rules that are considered incompatible with the implementation of the rest of the programme at the national level, including: free trade treaties that are opposed to ecological protectionism; the CAP that promotes a model that is contrary to farmer, organic and animal welfare friendly agriculture; free competition that prevents the constitution of public poles; austerity rules including the 3% deficit rule that prevents social and environmental investments;
2. The PCF spoke of a '*Europe à géométrie variable*'<sup>43</sup> (Europe of choice);
3. EÉLV firstly put forward the need to reform the European treaties, for example the party proposed to put an end to the SGP 'in order to build the convergence of states on renewed criteria and in line with the requirements of ecological transition';<sup>44</sup>
4. The PS also insisted on the need for economic reforms, for instance, to put an end to the austerity logic by replacing the SGP by a new pact 'with rules which are understandable to all citizens, adapted to the economic situation of each state and favouring investment'.<sup>45</sup>

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43 2022 PCF programme, op. cit.

44 2022 EÉLV programme, op. cit.

45 2022 PS programme, op. cit.

To sum up, in 2022, the four parties presented ambitious economic, social, and ecological programmes for the EU. Among the various proposals in their respective programmes that aimed at this goal, we can mention:

- To 'promote a European directive imposing a duty of vigilance on multi-nationals and to adopt a demanding monitoring of the origin of imported products, up to the point of blocking them, in particular in order to fight against deforestation and forced labour'<sup>46</sup> (EÉLV)
- To 'use France's veto power, for example, to reject any new free trade agreement or enlargement without prior social, fiscal and environmental harmonisation'<sup>47</sup> (LFI)
- To 'put a definitive end to the 3% authorised public deficit and the austerity straitjacket'<sup>48</sup> of the SGP (PCF)
- To 'introduce a stronger multi-national tax system with countries which wish to do so, in order to achieve a minimum tax rate that is higher than the 15% rate of the OECD agreement of 2021'<sup>49</sup> (PS)

To summarise, our analysis shows that the four parties use distinct lexicons and rely on different means, but that already in the 2022 presidential election, they shared many concrete proposals for changing the current EU. As we will see in the next section, this allowed EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS to build a common platform for the 2022 legislative elections.

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46 2022 EÉLV programme, op. cit.

47 2022 LFI programme, op. cit.

48 2022 PCF programme, op. cit.

49 2022 PS programme, op. cit.

## THE 2022 LEGISLATIVES ELECTIONS

The 2022 presidential election ended in a disappointing result for the left. The whole of the left-wing candidates only barely exceeded 30% of the votes cast. As mentioned in the introduction, LFI obtained 21.95% of the votes, and the other left-wing candidates mentioned in this note did not manage to exceed 5%, the minimum threshold to be able to benefit from the maximum reimbursement of an electoral campaign (EÉLV 4.63%, PCF 2.28%, PS 1.75%). After obtaining the highest score of the left in the first round of the 2022 presidential election, Mélenchon announced on 19 April 2022, five days before the results of the second round – which pitted Emmanuel Macron against Marine Le Pen – that he would ask the French people to ‘[elect] him Prime Minister’.<sup>50</sup> He announced his will to impose a cohabitation regardless of the political label of the President, and used the term ‘elect’ to give importance to these elections (that have become, because of the electoral calendar, confirmation elections of the presidential election), even though in France the Prime Minister is *appointed* by the President. It is in this context that LFI has called on the other left-wing forces to unite for the 2022 legislative elections. Prior to the establishment of the NUPES alliance, negotiations took place between LFI and each party regarding two main points: (1) the distribution of constituencies and (2) the programme.

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To understand how this alliance emerged, it is important to mention some characteristics of the partisan organisation of each party. Jean-Luc Mélenchon describes LFI as a ‘gaseous’ organisation, i.e. a movement that is neither vertical nor horizontal (Cervera-Marzal 2021). In practice, this means that there is ‘no official local relay’ within the party (Peraldi and Samson 2020) and no clearly identified leadership bodies. This impedes the emergence of institutionalised factions within the party that would be based on ideological or strategic differences. On the contrary, the PCF, EÉLV, and PS have a more traditional party organisation. The divisions within the party are therefore much easier to identify. Within the PCF, we can distinguish factions more open to left-wing

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50 Interview of Jean-Luc Mélenchon on BFMTV, by Bruce Toussaint, 19 April 2022. Available online: [www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/la-premiere-interview-de-jean-luc-melenchon-depuis-le-premier-tour-sur-bfmtv-en-integralite\\_VN-202204190615](http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/la-premiere-interview-de-jean-luc-melenchon-depuis-le-premier-tour-sur-bfmtv-en-integralite_VN-202204190615) (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

alliances (represented, for example, by Marie-George Buffet, Elsa Faucillon, Francis Wurtz), and factions more reluctant to it (represented, for example, by Fabien Roussel). Within EÉLV and the PS, we can distinguish between more 'leftist' and more 'centrist' factions (e.g. 'leftists' political camp is represented by Sandrine Rousseau within EÉLV, who was narrowly defeated by the more centrist Yannick Jadot [51% of the vote] in the 2021 French Green Party presidential primary; and by Olivier Faure within the PS). The disappointing results of the more centrist lines of EÉLV and the PS, represented by Yannick Jadot and Anne Hidalgo in the 2022 presidential election, and the failure of the candidacy of Fabien Roussel, enabled the start of negotiations for the creation of the NUPES.

To allocate the constituencies, the negotiators took into account the results of the presidential election, which were weighted according to the local presence of each party. In a strong position thanks to its score in the presidential election, LFI obtained the presentation of candidates in 326 constituencies, against 100 constituencies for the ecologist pole (77 for EÉLV), 70 for the PS, and 50 for the PCF. By obtaining 56.50% of the constituencies, LFI became thus the main force of the coalition.

The strong similarities between the programmes of EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS (see 2.2.1) have allowed these four political forces to set up a common programme for the 2022 legislative elections. It should be noted that the advantage obtained by LFI in the presidential election also enabled the party to find itself in a hegemonic position to build this programme. In fact the NUPES shared government programme is mainly based on LFI's programme, *L'Avenir en commun*, and includes 650 proposals grouped into eight chapters, and among which 33 would have been debated in the National Assembly in order to 'clarify or nuance' them.<sup>51</sup>

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51 See 2022 NUPES programmes. Available online: <https://nupes-2022.fr/le-programme> (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

## > NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Concerning **'social progress, jobs and pensions'**, the NUPES proposed, among other proposals, full retirement at the age of 60 after forty years of service, a minimum wage of 1,500 euros net per month, a reduction in working hours, the repeal of the labour law (El Khomri) implemented under the presidency of François Hollande, the limitation of wage differentials, and the recognition of burn-out as an occupational disease.

Regarding the **'ecology, biodiversity, climate, common goods and energy'** section, the NUPES called, among other proposals, for the inclusion of the 'green rule' (not taking more from nature than it can replenish) in the Constitution, the investment of 200 billion euros for an ecological bifurcation plan, the banning of factory farms, and the creation of a public transport and mobility pole. The four parties did not manage to agree on the nuclear phase-out, consequently leaving this issue open to be debated within the Parliament.

On **'wealth sharing and tax justice'**, the NUPES programme included, among other proposals, the renationalisation of strategic airports and motorways, the re-establishment and reinforcement of the ISF (with a climate component), and the freezing of prices on essential products.

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In the area of **'public services: health, education, culture and sport'**, the NUPES proposed, among other proposals, the end of activity-based pricing, an increase in the budget for culture, the lifting of patents on medicines, the reduction of class sizes and the abolition of Parcoursup (a Web-based platform set up to manage the placement of high school students in French higher education).

Regarding **institutional reforms**, the NUPES called, among other proposals, for the transition to the Sixth Republic, the inclusion of ecology in Article 1 of the Constitution ('France is an indivisible, secular, democratic, social and ecological Republic'), the introduction of the RIC, the right to vote at the age of 16 (except for the PCF), the recourse to referendums in the event of a constitutional change, gender parity in the government, and the introduction of a law to fight against media concentration.



With regard to **'security and justice'**, the NUPES planed, among other proposals, to combat sexual violence, to re-establish community policing, to abolish performance bonuses, and to repeal the Global Security law implemented in 2021 during Emmanuel Macron's first presidency.

Concerning the **'equality and the fight against discrimination'** section, the NUPES proposed, among other proposals, a budget of one billion euros to combat violence against women, the constitutionalisation of the right to abortion, and the guarantee of the right of citizenship for children born in France.

Concerning the **international** section, even if the question of NATO was not settled (e.g. the PS inscribed in the NUPES programme its wish to remain in the organisation), the four parties agreed to the following objectives: assume the independence of France in the world, build an independent, republican and popular defence, strengthen and democratise the United Nations (UN), re-found economic cooperation, extend the protection of international law to the planetary common goods, implement a humanist and realistic migration policy, build international policies from the overseas territories, build solidarity and alter-globalisation cooperation, unite the western Mediterranean basin around common objectives of progress, build a relationship with Africa based on the sovereignty of the people, bring to life a Francophonie of the people, re-launch the discovery of space.

## > EUROPEAN ISSUES

Regarding the European Union, it can be mentioned that the manifesto's chapter on Europe, unlike other chapters, does not contain more detailed aspects to be debated in the National Assembly because of a lack of consensus among the four parties. In this chapter, the NUPES recalled that, despite their differences, the four members of the coalition '[share] the common objective of putting an end to the neoliberal and productivist course of the European Union and of building a new project in the service of ecological, democratic and solidarity-based change'.<sup>52</sup>

This common objective has enabled them to agree on eleven objectives, each containing numerous proposals:

- **Strengthening the fight against climate change** i.a. by reaching the objective of a 65% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030;
- **Transforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, promoting i.a. the end of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides and the transition of industrial livestock farming to sustainable practices that respect animal welfare;
- **Extending social rights** pursuing i.a. the objective to harmonise European social rights and minimum wages from above to fight social dumping;
- **Improving Health** through i.a. the relocation of the production of medicines in Europe and the lifting of patents on vaccines and medicines;
- **An economy at the service of climate and citizens** achieved i.a. through the end of the Stability Pact and the abrogation of the 3% deficit- and 60% debt rule;
- **Investing together in the ecological and solidarity bifurcation**, i.a. by dedicating at least 50% of the EU budget to climate and biodiversity;
- **Eradicating tax evasion** through i.a. the establishment of a credible European list of tax havens and the imposition of sanctions against them;
- **Establishing social and ecological protections**, advocating i.a. for the refusal of any new free trade agreement;

- **Welcoming refugees and migrants with dignity** calling i.a. for the end of the Dublin III regulation;
- **Improving gender equality** promoting i.a. the inclusion of the right to abortion and all other sexual and reproductive rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;
- **Strengthening democracy** at European level, e.g. by the suspension of EU funding to Member States that do not respect the rule of law or fundamental freedoms.

The different members of NUPES recognise contradictions between their joint programme and European law. In order to overcome these contradictions – and despite the existing divergences in the four parties’ presidential programmes in 2022 (voir pages 28 – 37) – the parties agreed that certain rules of EU law should be disregarded. The NUPES identifies five major obstacles to the implementation of its programme: free trade treaties; ‘free and undistorted’ European competition; the CAP; the status of the European Central Bank (ECB) and EU austerity rules; and the free movement of capital.

In order to implement its programme, the NUPES parties agreed to ‘disobey’ (ÉÉLV, LFI, PCF) or to ‘derogate in a transitional manner’ (PS) from European rules. It should be noticed that the use of these different terms refers to a different history and relationship of each party with the European Union, but that in practice they imply a suspension of EU rules that have been identified as contradicting the rest of the programme. The NUPES also plans to convene a ‘European Convention for the revision and rewriting of the European treaties’.

## **VOTES AND COMMON BATTLES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (2019-2023)**

We have already shown the strong convergences between the programmes of the different members of the NUPES, however, we consider that it is also necessary to go beyond the analysis of the programmes in order to examine what concretely occurs in the European political arena where the forces of the NUPES co-exist and lead common fights. Therefore, in this third sub-section, we look at the votes of the parties in the European Parliament, after the Euro-

pean elections of May 2019. In the 2019 European elections, EÉLV and its list led by Yannick Jadot arrived in third national position with 13.48% of the votes (13 seats), LFI and its list led by Manon Aubry obtained 6.31% of the votes (6 seats), followed by the PS and its list (*PS-Place publique* [Public place]) led by Raphaël Glucksmann with 6.19% of the votes (6 seats).<sup>53</sup>

Here we analyse the electoral behaviour in the EP of the MEPs of EÉLV (Greens/EFA), LFI (GUE/NGL) and the PS (S&D). We left aside the PCF which has no MEPs in the EP in this mandate. We focused on the period from 1 July 2019 to 12 February 2023, and relied on data available from the AssistEU platform.<sup>54</sup> During this period, we were interested in 14,910 votes which are divided into 21 categories. It should be remarked that the analysis of EP votes has limitations because the votes of each party may be linked to their political positions and their own strategies within the EP (e.g. voting against a text because it is not ambitious enough), and therefore do not always reflect the similarities in the objectives of the different components of the NUPES that we have highlighted above (see pages 38 – 43). For example, while all three parties agree on the need to reform the CAP, EÉLV and LFI MEPs voted against some CAP-related plans that the PS approved, such as the plan 'Common agricultural policy (CAP): financing, management and monitoring 2021-2027', among other reasons it does not 'really allow the transition to the organic farming model to begin' (Manon Aubry, LFI).<sup>55</sup>

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53 Jordan Bardella (Rassemblement national) and its list 'Prenez le pouvoir' (Take the power) came first with 23.34% of the votes (23 seats), followed by the 'Renaissance' (Resurgence) list led by Nathalie Loiseau (La République en marche) with 22.42% of the votes (23 seats), by the 'Europe Ecologie' (Europe Ecology) list of Yannick Jadot who came third with 13.48% of the votes (13 seats), by the list 'Union de la droite et du centre' (Union of the Right and the Centre) led by François-Xavier Bellamy (right, Les Républicains [The Republicans, LR]) with 8.48% of the votes (8 seats), by the 'La France Insoumise' list led by Manon Aubry with 6.31% of the votes (6 seats), and by the 'Envie d'Europe écologique et sociale' (A desire for an ecological and social Europe) list led by Raphaël Glucksmann (Parti socialiste-Place publique) with 6.19% of the votes (6 seats).

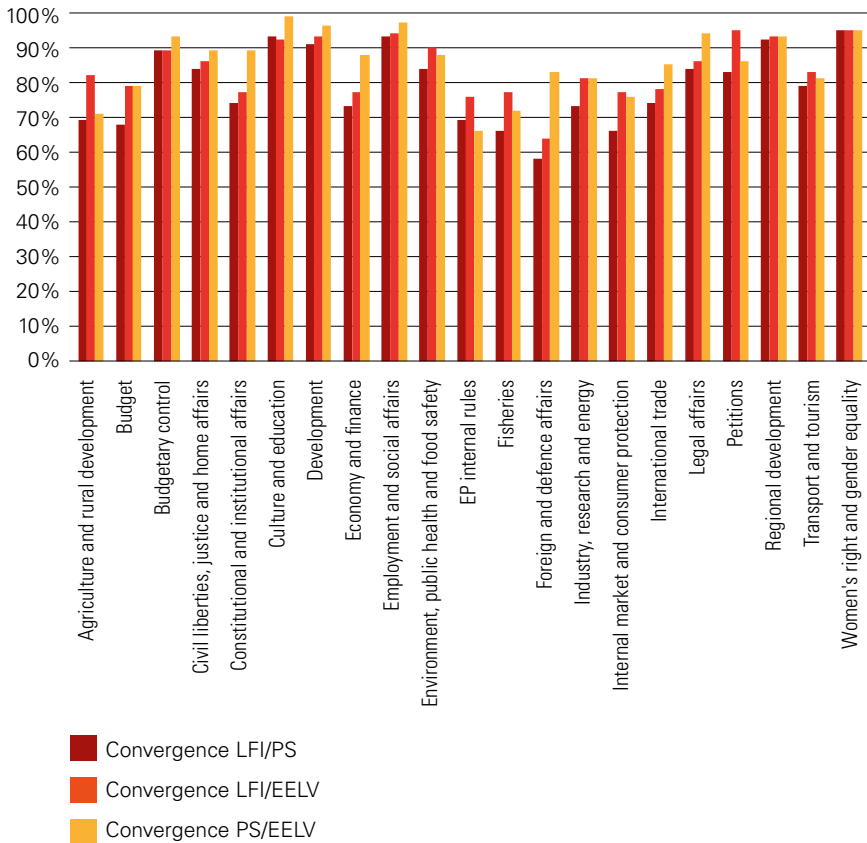
54 Available online: <https://app.assisteu.eu/?p=login> (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

55 Written explanation by Manon Aubry. Available on: <https://app.assisteu.eu/?p=login> (Accessed: 20 April 2023).

## VOTES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (2019 – 2023)

For each category, we looked at the percentage of cohesion of votes between LFI/PS, LFI/EÉLV, PS/EÉLV. The overall percentage of cohesion, on all the votes, is: 76% for LFI/PS, 81% for LFI/EÉLV, and 86% for PS/EÉLV.

### CONVERGENCE OF THE VOTES



**Graph 6**  
Convergence of the votes of LFI/PS, LFI/EÉLV, PS/EÉLV in the EP, 01.07.2019–12.01.2023

For ten categories, the convergence between the three parties is very high (between 80% and 100%). The convergence rates of LFI/PS, LFI/EÉLV and PS/EÉLV reach at least 90% regarding the categories 'culture and education', 'development', 'employment and social affairs', 'regional development', 'women's rights and gender equality'.<sup>56</sup> The convergence rates reach at least 80% regarding the categories 'budgetary control', 'civil liberties, justice and home affairs', 'environment, public health and food safety', 'legal affairs', and 'petitions'.

For five categories, the convergence between the three parties is high (between 70% and 79%): 'constitutional and institutional affairs', 'economy and finance', 'industry, research and energy', 'international trade', and 'transport and tourism'.<sup>57</sup>

For six categories, the convergence between the three parties stays at high levels (between 58% and 69%): 'agriculture and rural development', 'budget', 'EP internal rules', 'fisheries', 'foreign and defence affairs', and 'internal market and consumer protection'.<sup>58</sup>

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56 Convergence: 'budgetary control' (LFI/PS 89%, LFI/EÉLV 89%, PS/EÉLV 93%), 'civil liberties, justice and home affairs' (LFI/PS 84%, LFI/EÉLV 86%, PS/EÉLV 89%), 'culture and education' (LFI/PS 93%, LFI/EÉLV 92%, PS/EÉLV 99%), 'development' (LFI/PS 91%, LFI/EÉLV 93%, PS/EÉLV 96%), 'employment and social affairs' (LFI/PS 93%, LFI/EÉLV 94%, PS/EÉLV 97%), 'environment, public health and food safety' (LFI/PS 84%, LFI/EÉLV 90%, PS/EÉLV 88%), 'legal affairs' (LFI/PS 84%, LFI/EÉLV 86%, PS/EÉLV 94%), 'petitions' (LFI/PS 83%, LFI/EÉLV 95%, PS/EÉLV 86%), 'regional development' (LFI/PS 92%, LFI/EÉLV 93%, PS/EÉLV 93%), 'women's rights and gender equality' (LFI/PS 95%, LFI/EÉLV 95%, PS/EÉLV 95%).

57 Convergences: 'constitutional and institutional affairs' (LFI/PS 74%, LFI/EÉLV 77%, PS/EÉLV 89%), 'economy and finance' (LFI/PS 73%, LFI/EÉLV 77%, PS/EÉLV 88%), 'industry, research and energy' (LFI/PS 73%, LFI/EÉLV 81%, PS/EÉLV 81%), 'international trade' (LFI/PS 74%, LFI/EÉLV 78%, PS/EÉLV 85%), and 'transport and tourism' (LFI/PS 79%, LFI/EÉLV 83%, PS/EÉLV 81%).

58 Convergences: 'agriculture and rural development' (LFI/PS 69%, LFI/EÉLV 82%, PS/EÉLV 71%), 'budget' (LFI/PS 68%, LFI/EÉLV 79%, PS/EÉLV 79%), 'EP internal rules' (LFI/PS 69%, LFI/EÉLV 76%, PS/EÉLV 66%), 'fisheries' (LFI/PS 66%, LFI/EÉLV 77%, PS/EÉLV 72%), 'foreign and defence affairs' (LFI/PS 58%, LFI/EÉLV 64%, PS/EÉLV 83%), and 'internal market and consumer protection' (LFI/PS 66%, LFI/EÉLV 77%, PS/EÉLV 76%).

Five important findings should be highlighted.

First, there is a high convergence between the three parties' votes in the EP on **every policy issue** – the minimum convergence rate being 58% and concerning only one category. For example, all three parties have the same agenda concerning the desire to support the feminist struggle, the desire to promote cultural and educational policies, they also convergence regarding health policies, employment policies, social policies, economy and finance issues. Regarding the latter, cohesions exist with regard to free trade agreements and a common position to block them – e.g. in 2020 on the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Vietnam (see A9-0003/2020).

Second, EÉLV, PS and LFI fight common battles in the EP on **environmental policies**, notably on the CAP, on pesticides, and on subsidies to small farmers, with very high convergence rates on the 'environment, public health and food safety' domains (LFI/PS 84%, LFI/EÉLV 90%, PS/EÉLV 88%), and on the domains linked to 'agriculture and rural development' (LFI/PS 69%, LFI/EÉLV 82%, PS/EÉLV 71%).

Third, EÉLV, PS and LFI are committed to the defence of **the rule of law**, as reflected in the NUPES common programme for the 2022 legislative elections (see 2.2.2). Convergence rates during the last mandate in the areas of 'civil liberties, justice and home affairs' are 84% for LFI/PS, 86% for LFI/EÉLV, and 89% for PS/EÉLV 89%. The three parties fight strong common battles in the European arena to uphold the rule of law, as for example with the vote in favour of 'the Establishment of an EU Mechanism on Democracy, the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights' in 2020. EÉLV, the PS and LFI also vote in favour of EP resolutions concerning the non-respect of the rule of law by countries such as Bulgaria (see, for example, B9-0309/2020), Malta (see, for example, B9-0240/2019), Hungary (see, for example, B9-0511/2022) or Poland (see A9-0138/2020).

Fourth, despite the widespread belief that there are substantive differences on **international policy issues** between the three parties, the analysis of the votes in the EP shows instead that there are important convergences – 58% for LFI/PS, 64% for LFI/EÉLV, 83% for PS/EÉLV. Differences in votes exist regarding the relationship between the United States and the European

Union, e.g. unlike the PS and EÉLV, LFI MEPs voted against the text on ‘the future of EU-US relations’ because they considered it to be ‘part of caricatural atlanticist approach [...] and NATO as the foundation of Europe’s collective defence’.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, on the contrary, a strong cohesion on the votes concerning the war in Ukraine must be underlined, contrary to the various media and political comments that tend to oppose LFI on the one hand, and EÉLV and PS on the other. Since the beginning of the war, EÉLV, LFI and the PS have voted in favour of 29 reports (including political resolutions and support packages) defining the European response to the war in Ukraine. The only difference in terms of votes was LFI’s abstention on the resolution calling Russia a ‘terrorist state’ which was voted for by EÉLV and the PS (even though in this specific case, the Greens and S&D groups also contested the use of this term). Despite a common agreement on the need to strongly condemn the Russian aggression and to support the Ukrainian people, including sanctions and military aid, nuances can be noted on the emphasis put on military support (EÉLV/PS) or on the need for the EU to press for a diplomatic end to the war (LFI).

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Fifth, it is also interesting to note that there are very high rates of convergence regarding institutional and organisational issues regarding the competencies of the **European Union** despite the apparent divergences that exist between the three parties that we have identified in the national programmes. These similarities concern the categories ‘budget’ (LFI/PS 68%, LFI/EÉLV 79%, PS/EÉLV 79%), ‘budgetary control’ (LFI/PS 89%, LFI/EÉLV 89%, PS/EÉLV 93%), and the ‘EP internal rules’ (LFI/PS 69%, LFI/EÉLV 76%, PS/EÉLV 66%). For instance, concerning the EP rules, on 10 March 2022, the three parties voted in favour of the ‘special committee on Covid-19’ to be able to reinforce the coordination of EU members in the field of health. The three parties also converge on the issue of the institutional functioning of the EU (e.g. willingness to democratise it; proposal for an independent ethical authority; right of initiative).

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59 Written explanation by Manon Aubry. Available on <https://app.assisteu.eu/?p=login> (Accessed: 20 April 2023).



## DIVERGENCES AND SIMILARITIES: WHAT SOLUTIONS? WHAT COMMON BATTLES?

The similarities that we have highlighted in the three parties' votes in the EP have enabled them to fight common battles. These include, for instance, the rejection of the climate package considered too unambitious in view of the climate emergency; the rejection of the inclusion of nuclear and gas activities in the list of environmentally sustainable activities (taxonomy); the lifting of patents on vaccines; the tax on super-profits; the refusal of new free trade agreements; proposals for more transparency and integrity, such as the joint motion for a resolution (see RC-B9-0581/2022) following the Qatargate corruption scandal in the European Parliament in December 2022.

Regarding the issues that are not consensual within the NUPES, we argue that for the vast majority of them, equilibrium positions are in fact achievable in practice. For instance, regarding the question of the enlargement of the EU, it could be possible to go beyond principled positions (support/obstruction) to start discussing general criteria (on the Balkans as well as on Ukraine), e.g. prior social and fiscal harmonisation. Concerning the 'Europe of Defence' (where we underlined the divergences between LFI/PCF and EÉLV/PS), an alternative to the opposition between 'pro' and 'anti' would be possible, for example, by imagining a common support to a Europe of Defence which would not be affiliated to NATO but would carry a European non-alignment position. Concerning the stance of the parties towards supranational federalism, while the European federalism of EÉLV is often put forward as opposed to the European programme of LFI and the PCF, it would be possible to go beyond the dichotomy between supranational federalism and national sovereignty. This opposition could, for example, be overcome by concrete proposals to improve democracy at the EU level (e.g. a right of initiative for the EP, already defended by the NUPES) and solutions provided theme by theme (e.g. LFI did not oppose the extension of health coordination competence after the Covid-19 pandemic).



**WHAT PROSPECTS  
FOR THE NUPES IN THE 2024  
EUROPEAN ELECTIONS?**

In this third and final section, based on our previous analysis, we evaluate the prospects for the different NUPES forces in the next European elections in 2024. It should be stated at the outset that, at the national level, European elections are often considered secondary, and mobilise fewer voters than national elections (Guinaudeau 2012; Persico and Saurugger 2019). Despite the European nature of these elections, alliance strategies, list building and campaigning often have a national dimension, which sometimes leads them to be seen as ‘second-order elections’ that are ‘determined more by the domestic political cleavages’ (Reif, Schmitt, and Norris 1997). Yet recent events – from the Covid-19 crisis to the war in Ukraine – have recalled the importance of the power of the European Parliament, particularly through the extraordinary legislative initiatives that have been taken during this period. In France, it should also be noted that in 2019 a change in the French voting system with the introduction of a single national constituency (instead of eight interregional constituencies) led to a higher national politicisation of the main issues treated during the European elections, resulting in the highest turnout since 1994 (over 50%).

## **A COMMON PROGRAMME OF THE FRENCH LEFT FOR THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS OF 2024?**

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Crises can lead to a restructuring of the cultural hegemony in place, a redefinition of the social pact that binds citizens together, and the emergence and/or consolidation of new political forces (Laclau 2005). We argue that the new political timeframe identified in Section 1 suggests that a project for a more just, social, democratic and ecological EU is possible, and that the forces of the left can now take advantage of this new context to consolidate their alliance built up for the 2022 legislative elections, and their forces in the European Parliament. This new window of opportunity could allow the left to impose its themes on the public agenda. For example, the general acceptance of the prominent role of the state during Covid could help revive the idea that the state can play a central role in ecological planning; or, as Oxfam proposes,

political forces could welcome the EU super-profits tax while calling for it to be 'strengthened' on 'all the companies that are profiting from this crisis'.<sup>60</sup>

Our analysis of the electoral programmes of ÉÉLV, LFI, PCF and PS for the 2022 presidential election showed that there had been a rapprochement between the parties between 2006 and 2022, and that this rapprochement was accelerated after the five-year term of François Hollande that led to a clear breach from the old social democracy and the rest of the left. This rapprochement took place on cultural and societal issues; on democratic issues as all four parties aim to 'radicalise' democracy (Mouffe 2018) while remaining within the framework of liberal democracies and on environmental topics, as left-wing parties have generally integrated these issues into their programmes, (Dalton 2009; Persico 2015), especially in the context of the recent 'greening' of radical left parties (Wang and Keith 2020).

In the perspective of the 2024 European elections, a common programme, linking national and European issues, seems to be conceivable and strategically desirable for the left. As it was the case for the distribution of constituencies during the 2022 legislative elections between the different members of NUPES, the list for the European elections could be built considering the electoral results of the 2022 elections and the 2019 European elections. A common list would not necessarily imply the formation of a single group in the EP. As it is the case at the national level (each component of the NUPES has its own group in the National Assembly), at the European level, each party could sit in its own group but they could all work together on a shared agenda. This is even easier in the European Parliament, where no single group has a majority, and which has a stronger parliamentary culture than the National Assembly in France. The 2024 programme for the European elections could be based on the votes in the EP during the last legislature and on the 'European Union and international' chapter of the shared government programme NUPES that could be further developed.

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60 Unknown, 'Taxe sur les Superprofits: une proposition européenne de bon sens mais qui doit être renforcée, Oxfam France', 14 September 2022. Available online: [www.oxfamfrance.org/communiqués-de-presse/taxe-sur-les-superprofits-une-proposition-europeenne-de-bon-sens-mais-qui-doit-etre-renforcee](http://www.oxfamfrance.org/communiqués-de-presse/taxe-sur-les-superprofits-une-proposition-europeenne-de-bon-sens-mais-qui-doit-etre-renforcee) (Accessed: 22 April 2023).

Following the model of the NUPES in the 2022 legislative elections, a European programme could emphasise the need to disobey European rules if they conflict with the implementation of the programme. The programme could also propose the organisation of a 'European Convention for the revision and rewriting of the European treaties' in order to make EU rules compatible with the implementation of a left-wing programmes both at European and national levels. The European chapter of the program for NUPES in the legislative elections has already established a common plan that has been approved and that could be used for the European elections. This programmatic work would be easier to achieve as concrete proposals connected to actual parliamentary competences are mostly consensual among the members of the NUPES. It could include several proposals to make the EU:<sup>61</sup>

- more **socially and economically fair** (e.g. harmonisation of European social rights and a minimum wage from the top in order to combat social dumping; the improvement of working conditions; the ending of the Stability and Growth Pact and the abolition of the budgetary rules of 3% deficit and 60% debt; the ending of unanimity in tax matters to remove the veto power of tax havens; change the missions and statutes of the ECB; place the ECB under democratic control; obtain that the ECB transforms the part of the states' debt that it owns into perpetual debt at zero interest)
- capable of responding to **the environmental emergency** (e.g. objective of 65% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030; refusal of new free trade agreements; transformation of the CAP; adoption of a 'Buy European' act; legislation on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides; financial regulation; creation of new own resources such as an extended financial transaction tax)
- more **democratic** (e.g. creation of a binding European Citizens' Initiative; giving the European Parliament a budgetary power and a right of initiative; establishment of ethics bodies and stricter supervision of lobbies particularly following Qatargate)

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61 See 2022 NUPES programmes, op. cit.

- based on **solidarity** (e.g. the ending of the Dublin III Regulation; renegotiation of the pact for Migration and Asylum)
- a Europe of **rights and equality** (e.g. suspension of EU funding to member states that do not respect the rule of law or fundamental freedoms; harmonisation from the top of women's rights in Europe; inclusion of the right to abortion in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union)
- a Europe of **peace and global diplomacy** (e.g. defence of the sovereignty and freedom of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and the integrity of its borders; creation of an international economic justice tribunal to try transnational financial crimes; European cooperations for defence industries; European initiatives for international green treaties)

Beyond this programme, the different components of the NUPES would certainly benefit from joining forces in order to set up common strategies, using a strategy of disobedience to the European rules considered illegitimate, and using the European Parliament in order to be able to set up its programme in the perspective of a successful conquest of power at the national level.

## NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF PROPOSALS OF THE 2022 NUPES COMMON

### EUROPE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Harmonise European social rights and minimum wage upwards in order to combat social dumping, improve working conditions and converge towards the best social deal

Fight against relocation

Defend the principle of 'equal work, equal pay and equal social contributions' by modifying the current organisation of posted work

Impose a presumption of salaried status for platform workers

Develop a European plan to combat poverty, particularly among children and the elderly

Encourage and help member states to guarantee universal access to health services, including mental health services, in particular by combating medical deserts, relocating the production of medicines in Europe and lifting patents on vaccines and medicines

End the Stability and Growth Pact and abolish the budgetary rules of 3% deficit and 60% debt

Change the missions and statutes of the ECB to allow it to lend directly to States and place it under democratic control

Refuse all new free trade agreements

Put an end to unanimity in tax matters to remove the veto power of tax havens

Establish a minimum corporate tax rate of 25%

Establish a credible European list of tax havens and impose sanctions on them, to end tax competition within the EU

### EUROPE & ENVIRONMENT

Objective of 65% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030

Raise the European targets for renewable energy production

Establish 30% of protected areas

Remove gas and nuclear from the EU taxonomy

Adopt a new environmental treaty that includes the crime of ecocide

Transform the CAP to serve agro-ecology and peasant and relocated agriculture

Move away from synthetic fertilizers and pesticides

Transition from industrial livestock farming to sustainable and animal welfare friendly practices

Create new own resources (e.g. tax on financial transactions, mileage tax, paraffin)

Dedicate at least 50% of the budget to climate and bio-diversity

Establish new cooperation based on binding and controllable social, environmental and health clauses

Implement social and ecological taxation at borders

Integrate local production criteria into European public procurement

### EUROPE & DEMOCRACY

Granting the European Parliament budgetary power and a right of initiative

Create a binding European Citizens' Initiative (an European RIC)

Establish permanent spaces for debate which allow the contributions of civil society actors, associations, trade unions and local and regional authorities to be taken into account



## PROGRAMME APPLICABLE TO A COMMON EUROPEAN PROGRAMME

### EUROPE & SOLIDARITY

End the Dublin III Regulation

Renegotiate the pact for Migration and Asylum

Promote the creation of legal and safe channels for migration

Create a rescue corps at sea and put an end to the violation of fundamental rights by Frontex

### EUROPE & RIGHTS / EQUALITY

Suspend EU funding to member states that do not respect the rule of law or fundamental freedoms

Defend a European regulation on the independence of the media, and strictly control lobbies

Harmonise from the top women's rights in Europe

Include the right to abortion and all other sexual and reproductive rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFR) and make it directly applicable

Strengthen the fight against all forms of discrimination, whether related to origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity

Defend the rights of minorities

### EUROPE & PEACE

Defend the sovereignty and freedom of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and the integrity of its borders, in an international context of tension and war on the European continent and in the face of war crimes committed by Vladimir Putin

To fully reinvest the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Reaffirm that the UN is the only legitimate body for collective security on a global scale

Demand transparency in the deliberations of the UN Security Council and its reform for a fairer representation of the continents, in particular Africa

Bring forward proposals within the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for a break with international neo-liberalism and for democratisation, and reinvest the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

Support the creation of an international court for climate and environmental justice

Create an international economic justice tribunal to try transnational financial crimes

## SHORT- AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN JOINING FORCES

Our study has shown that a programmatic union between the four components of NUPES for the 2024 European elections is possible. Our analysis echoes recent electoral analyses which have shown that French citizens declaring proximity to EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS shared similar values overall, with differences in the degree of adherence to certain values, but that there were no fundamental differences, suggesting that it '[did] not seem likely to prevent any form of unity' (Bristielle 2022).

Despite these elements, and LFI's call to unite for the next European elections, there is, to date, little response or negative responses from the other three parties regarding the renewal of the NUPES in the 2024 European elections. Part of the reason for this might be that, at first sight, it may seem preferable for EÉLV, the PCF and the PS to compete alone given that the party-list proportional representation would certainly allow them to obtain more satisfactory results than in the presidential election (as a reminder, respectively 4.63%, 2.28% and 1.75% against 21.95% for LFI) considering that LFI would not benefit from a 'useful vote' in its favour as it was the case in the 2022 presidential election. Moreover, LFI voters are less mobilised in the European elections, which is likely to lead to a rebalancing of forces in these elections. However, we argue that there is a threefold interest in this alliance: (1) the consolidation of a **progressive and popular bloc** that will ensure, at the national and European levels, the **survival of the values** held by left-wing parties; (2) there are also **individual party interests** (e.g. solidifying electorates, party survival); and (3) the possibility to establish a **coherent electoral offer** over the long term.

## > INTEREST 1

### A collective interest: the constitution of a 'democratic-ecosocialist left' bloc to counter the 'liberal-globalist centre' and the 'conservative-identitarian right'

Martin (2018: 258) has highlighted that, from 2015 onwards, three blocs in European party systems could be identified in terms of values: a 'democratic-ecosocialist left', a 'liberal-globalist centre', a 'conservative-identitarian right'. The first interest in consolidating the NUPES lies in the fact that, in the medium and long term, an alliance strategy can allow for a consolidation of the left progressive bloc at national and European levels and thus make it possible to oppose the liberal and reactionary forces. The constitution of a strong democratic-ecosocialist political offer by the main French left-wing parties would potentially allow the NUPES list to finish first ahead of the RN and LREM in the European elections of 2024, and thus establish this political force as the leading one in the country.

The results of the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections in France showed that Jean-Luc Mélenchon had succeeded in federating a very large part of the voters of the 'democratic-ecosocialist' bloc, and Emmanuel Macron a very large part of the '(neo)liberal-globalist bloc'. To survive in the medium and long term, the interest of ÉÉLV, the PCF and the PS might be to join one of these two blocs, for instance by becoming part of an alliance. Our analysis of their electoral programmes shows that they belong, because of the values they defend, to the left-wing bloc. Given the programmatic proximity between the members of the NUPES, we argue that it would be counterproductive to run separate electoral campaigns that would certainly incite differentiation and partisan identity-based campaigning strategies as seen during the 2022 presidential election (e.g. an artificial opposition between 'pro' and 'anti' Europe; a 'meat' left against a 'soy' left; a pro-hunting left against an animalist left, etc.).

A common list for the European elections could consolidate the so-called democratic-ecosocialist bloc, while also allowing for the diversity of left-wing forces and currents to exist and be represented in the European Parliament, notably through the constitution of an intergroup (based on the national model) with independent delegations in each group. A common list could also avoid the impact of the 5% vote threshold required to enter the EP, which

had prevented parties such as *Génération(s)* and the PCF from obtaining elected representatives in the 2019 European elections (a first for the PCF since 1979).

## > INTEREST 2

### Organisational and strategic interests: the survival of the parties

To date, ÉÉLV, the PCF and the PS do not seem, in view of the latest elections, to have yet found a structuring place within the democratic-ecosocialist bloc which is today mainly embodied by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. While it is legitimate that these three parties do not want to see their identity diluted with that of the NUPES, it should be noted that the survival of their identity does not necessarily require an individual candidate strategy.

Regarding the case of the *Parti socialiste*, a look at the Spanish case provides important lessons about the survival of social democracy. If the PS wishes to rise from its ashes, it would certainly be through the perpetuation of the strategy of rapprochement with the radical left. In Europe, in countries where the radical left has consolidated and/or taken power, social-democratic parties have generally collapsed. This collapse of 'governing party clubs' (Martin 2018: 146) has for instance affected Greece (collapse of PASOK in favour of Syriza), or France (collapse of the PS from the 2017 presidential election in favour of LFI). The Greek and French cases have given force to the 'end of the social democratic century' theses (Dahrendorf 1980). The resilience of social democracy has taken place in countries, such as Spain, where the social democratic *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE) has initiated a 'left turn' in its programme, initiated a break with the liberal and austerity direction the party had taken under the presidency of Zapatero (PSOE, 2004–2011), and reached out to the radical left represented by *Podemos* (e.g. establishment of a coalition government since January 2020).

When it comes to EÉLV, it should be noted at the outset that, during the 2022 presidential election, LFI succeeded in capturing the environmental issue. As mentioned in section 2, the programmes of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Yannick Jadot have been evaluated by many environmental associations as being equally ecological. Considering this, and the similarities of the environmental programmes defended by LFI and EÉLV both at the national and European levels (see Section 2), we argue that there is not necessarily a strategic interest for EÉLV to compete alone, but rather an interest in allying the ecological forces to propose a programme of rupture capable of responding to the climate emergency. Moreover, the risk that EÉLV runs in detaching itself from the NUPES would be to end up being assimilated to the liberal-globalist centre bloc, and distance itself from its electorate which is strongly left-wing. The case of the German Green Party, *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (Alliance 90/The Greens), is an illustrative example of such a trajectory. The ‘traffic light’ coalition government set up in November 2021 between the social democratic party *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD), the liberal party *Freie Demokratische Partei* (Free Democratic Party, FDP), and *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* has brought the ecological party to power. However, it also led the greens to accept compromises in the field of energy – e.g. in anticipation of the energy crisis that would result from the war in Ukraine, the party has relaxed its anti-nuclear and coal phase-out policy, and has been opened to free trade agreements. These compromises and renunciations have not failed to provoke reactions from some party activists and from part of their electorate who consider them a betrayal.

Looking at the PCF, as already mentioned, after having supported the candidacy of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the 2012 and 2017 presidential elections, in 2022, the party decided to present its own candidate. After the 2012 presidential election, in which the Left Front obtained 11.1% of the vote, relations between the two main members of the FDG – the *Parti de gauche* represented by Mélenchon, and the PCF – began to deteriorate. Conceived as an electoral coalition, the FDG was nevertheless no more than a symbolic empty shell in terms of long-term perspectives and organisation. Despite the strong similarities in the programmes of LFI and the PCF for the 2022 presidential election, Fabien Roussel had, during the electoral campaign, first put on the agenda the main differences concerning both programmes. He had, for example, positioned himself in favour of nuclear power, highlighted the importance of security and policing, and opposed, during the *Fête de l'Humanité* [Festival of Humanity] in September 2022, a left of 'labour value' (that he represents) to a 'left of benefits'. However, as pointed out above, the historical points of disagreement between LFI and the PCF within the FDG were not primarily about the programme itself, but rather about organisational issues and the survival of the political party (the PCF did not want to be diluted within the FDG). The success of Fabien Roussel's strategy of *differentiation* can be questioned considering that the PCF only obtained 2.28% of the vote in the 2022 presidential election. Therefore, we argue that at the risk of continuing a 'regular and constant decrease in its influence and its audience' (Courtois and Lazar 2022), the PCF has every interest in consolidating an electoral alliance with the other members of the NUPES.

### > INTEREST 3

#### A coherent electoral offer to create an electoral dynamic

Thirdly, an electoral coalition could bring hope to left-wing voters and start an electoral dynamic, and failure to renew this electoral coalition could damage the long-term electoral performance of the NUPES components at the national level. The three-bloc configuration already existed in 2019, but the left was invisible due to the fragmentation of NUPES at the time. Although electoral behaviour does not simply follow an arithmetical logic, it is worth noting that in the 2019 European election the addition of the results of the different candidates presented by the parties that compose the NUPES could have allowed a common list to arrive first in these elections at the national level (ÉELV 13.48%, LFI 6.31%, PCF 2.49%, PS 6.19%). Moreover, some NUPES parties in 2019 did not reach the 5% threshold and thus had no MEPs, therefore a common list could have, in theory, resulted in a higher total number of left-wing MEPs.

Competing together in the European elections could therefore strengthen the progressive left bloc confirming the NUPES as the first alternative in French politics against the neoliberal and conservative right political forces. Moreover, competing in the elections separately could also create illegibility for the electorate after the creation of the NUPES intergroup in the National Assembly, and while the different members of the alliance oppose, in the name of NUPES, the 2023 pension reform of Emmanuel Macron. Recently, in the battle against this pension reform, the NUPES presented itself – in the Assembly as well as on the streets – as a credible alternative to the duel between the liberal centre represented by Emmanuel Macron, and the radical right of Marine le Pen. The decision to compete separately may seem difficult to understand and might convey the impression that partisan games and the survival of each organisation takes precedence over their political programme. A third interest of the renewal of the NUPES electoral alliance therefore lies in the necessary clarity and coherence that must be provided to the electorate, in order to envision the implementation of more democratic, social and environmentally sustainable public policies.



**IV**



**TO SUM UP**

In this study, we argued that there are strategic and ideological interests in consolidating the NUPES coalition for three main reasons.

- First, the new European political environment opened up in 2020 offers the possibility of a cultural and electoral victory for the left at the national and European levels in the short and long term.
- Second, there are high degrees of convergence between the programmes of EÉLV, LFI, the PCF and the PS.
- Third, there are strong strategic interests for each of the parties to be part of this alliance.

In Europe, regarding the left, a first cycle in the 2000s was marked by a wave of radical left coalitions with, for instance, the *Bloco de Esquerda* (Left Bloc) in Portugal, *Die Linke* (The Left) in Germany, the *Front de gauche* in France, and Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) in Greece. In the 2010s, the Great Recession of 2008 opened a new political timeframe with the electoral consolidation of anti-austerity left-wing coalitions movements (e.g. Syriza) and the beginning of a 'populist moment' (Torreblanca 2015) characterized by the emergence of political forces such as *Podemos* and LFI, that invented new partisan forms (e.g. movement-party) and pitted 'those at the top' against 'those at the bottom' (Tarragoni 2019). The beginning of the 2020s, and the advent in 2022 of the NUPES in France could mark the beginning of a new time period shaped by the return of left-wing alliances. The first elements available suggest that the strategy and rhetoric of these new coalitions will be partly derived from the 2010s (e.g. abandonment of the symbols of the historical left in favour of a more modern political communication). The advent of these new left alliances in the 2020s could help consolidate the democratic-ecosocialist bloc in Europe and counter the neoliberal hegemony and the threat of the far right which is gaining ground in a large majority of European countries, and at EU level.

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