



The European Conservatives and Reformists in the European Parliament

Standard Note: SN/IA/6918

Last updated: 16 June 2014

Author: Vaughne Miller

Section International Affairs and Defence Section

Parties are continuing negotiations to form political groups in the European Parliament (EP) following European elections on 22-25 May 2014. This note looks at the future composition of the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR), which was established by UK Conservatives when David Cameron took them out of the centre-right EPP-ED group in 2009.

It also considers what the entry of the German right-wing *Alternative für Deutschland* group into the ECR group might mean for Anglo-German relations.

The ECR might become the third largest political group in the EP, although this depends on support for the Liberals and Democrats group.

The final number and composition of EP political groups will not be known until after 24 June 2014, which is the deadline for registering groups.

For detailed information on the EP election results, see Research paper 14/32, [European Parliament Elections 2014](#), 11 June 2014.

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as being up to date; the law or policies may have changed since it was last updated; and it should not be relied upon as legal or professional advice or as a substitute for it. A suitably qualified professional should be consulted if specific advice or information is required.

This information is provided subject to [our general terms and conditions](#) which are available online or may be provided on request in hard copy. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing with Members and their staff, but not with the general public.

Contents

1	The composition of the ECR group	2
2	The Law and Justice Party	3
3	The Alternative für Deutschland	4
3.1	The vote on ECR affiliation	4
3.2	What are the AfD's aims?	4
3.3	Are there implications for Anglo-German relations?	5
4	Other ECR parties	6

1 The composition of the ECR group

Across Great Britain, UKIP came first with 27.5% of the vote. Labour came second with 25.4%, ahead of the Conservatives with 23.9%. The Conservatives won 19 seats, losing seven MEPs, including the outgoing European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group leader, Martin Callanan. UK Conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) are the largest parties in the group. The following table shows the current composition of the ECR.¹

Member parties according to member country, seat count and former alliance in the EU Parliament.

Party	Country	Seats	Status
Conservative Party	United Kingdom	19	Member
Law and Justice (PiS)	Poland	19	Member
Alternative for Germany	Germany	7	New
Danish People's Party	Denmark	4	Former EFD
Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	Czech Republic	2	Member
Finns Party	Finland	2	Former EFD
Bulgaria Without Censorship	Bulgaria	1	New
Christian Union (CU)	Netherlands	1	Member
Croatian Party of Rights	Croatia	1	Member
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania	Lithuania	1	Member
Family Party of Germany	Germany	1	New
Independent Greeks	Greece	1	New
National Alliance	Latvia	1	Member

¹ [EurActiv, 12 June 2014](#)

Party	Country	Seats	Status
New Majority (NOVA)	Slovakia	1	New
Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OI'aNO)	Slovakia	1	New
Slovak New Majority	Slovakia	1	New

The ECR, currently with 63 MEPs, might become the third-largest group in the EP after the EPP and the S&D. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) currently has 62 seats, but might overtake the ECR if currently unaffiliated MEPs from the Portuguese Earth Party and the Spanish UPYD and *Ciudanos* parties are admitted, bringing the total ALDE number to at least 65 MEPs.² The ALDE were the 'kingmakers' in the last Parliament, with 83 MEPs, "often the decisive faction in reaching majorities on certain bills, and a crucial partner for the two major factions, the socialist S&D and centre-right EPP".³

ECR group members have voted for the UK MEP, Syed Kamall, to become group chairman. Kamall is the first Muslim to lead the group, in which some members have expressed anti-Islam views in the past.

2 The Law and Justice Party

The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) was founded in 2001 by Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who later became president and prime minister of Poland respectively. It has 138 seats in the Lower House, the *Sejm*, and 30 in the Senate, making it the second-largest party in the Polish Parliament.

The UK alliance with the PiS in 2009 was criticised for being allegedly homophobic, eccentric, nationalistic⁴ unpleasant, ugly,⁵ and anti-Semitic.⁶ David Cameron and the Foreign Secretary William Hague defended the alliance with the PiS and denied that it was homophobic. The PiS also denied such accusations.⁷

The party took 19 seats in the 2014 election and its membership of the ECR has attracted less opposition this time, as media attention has focused on new entrants AfD (see below), and individuals from Danish and Finnish right-wing parties.

The PiS has been described as 'soft eurosceptic' in that it opposes a federal Europe and is more 'Atlanticist', but it is not against Poland's EU membership. In its campaigns, the party emphasises that the EU should "[serve] Poland and not the other way around".⁸

² See [Europe Decides website](#) for current information on which parties have gone/are thinking of going where.

³ [EurActiv](#), 5 June 2014.

⁴ [Telegraph](#), 1 June 2009.

⁵ Denis MacShane, quoted in [Independent](#), 3 May 2009.

⁶ [Guardian](#) 7 October 2009.

⁷ See [Guardian letters](#), 7 May 2009

⁸ 'Campaigning in Europe - Campaigning for Europe: Political Parties, Campaigns, Mass Media and the European Parliament Elections 2004', Michaela Maier, Jens Tenschler, 2006.

3 The Alternative für Deutschland

3.1 The vote on ECR affiliation

On 12 June 2014 the ECR group voted by a simple majority in a secret ballot to accept the German anti-euro *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in the group. In the September 2013 German general election, the party won 4.7% of the vote, just missing the five per cent threshold which must be cleared to get parliamentary seats. In the EP elections the AfD won 7% of the vote and has seven MEPs.

The vote on admitting the AfD party was reported to be close, with 29 current ECR Members voting in favour and 26 against.⁹ It is understood that at least two UK Conservative MEPs support the AfD's affiliation. [ConservativeHome](#) reported on 4 June 2014 that the PiS members of the group favoured AfD membership and that most UK Conservatives did too. Specifically, "five of them – Nirj Deva, Julie Girling, Ashley Fox, Daniel Hannan and David Campbell Bannerman – have tweeted their support for AfD". The [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that, according to insider information, all 19 UK members voted against the AfD. David Cameron had no say in the matter and the Conservative Party has stated: "We are very disappointed that AfD have been admitted into the ECR against our wishes. We note that the vote was a close one" and "We will work with the AfD in the European Parliament but the CDU/CSU remains our only sister party in Germany".¹⁰

Open Europe speculated that the decision to admit the AfD "appears to involve a concerted effort to strip UKIP's EFD group of its member parties, leading to its collapse, depriving them of cash and demolishing their platform".¹¹

3.2 What are the AfD's aims?

The party's [manifesto for the 2014 EP elections](#) stated that it "aims for a European Union of sovereign states. It rejects a European federal state on the model of the United States of America, because there is no European nation as such and no single European constitutive populace". The AfD is critical of Chancellor Merkel's European policy. Its main aim is to dismantle the euro, or at the very least bring about the temporary exit of weaker euro States, and they "feel as strongly about 'welfare tourism' as the Tories do".¹² Bert Van Roosebeke, of the Centre for European Politics at Freiburg University, was quoted as saying: "They are a one-issue party and the euro rescue is not a matter for the parliament but for governments. So they may be disappointed".¹³

The AfD leader, Bernd Lucke, told the *Financial Times*¹⁴ that his party had "agreement on David Cameron's agenda for Europe. We support his views on a more decentralised EU ... We are exactly the right guys to support his views in Germany. The CDU doesn't support his ideas. We have the same policies as David Cameron. I think he is being used". This last comment referred to AfD allegations that the German Chancellor was manipulating the UK Prime Minister into "shunning a natural ally" and mobilising David Cameron into solving her own domestic political problems and isolating the AfD. Hans-Olaf Henkel, lead candidate for

⁹ [EUObserver](#), 12 June 2014

¹⁰ [PoliticsHome](#), 12 June 2014; [Financial Times](#), 12 June 2014

¹¹ [Open Europe blog](#), 11 June 2014.

¹² [EUObserver](#), 12 June 2014.

¹³ [Financial Times](#), 26 May 2014.

¹⁴ [Financial Times](#), 30 May 2014.

the AfD in the EP elections, has said that “With the ECR, we have found a colleague that has the same values and goals as us”.¹⁵

Open Europe Director Mats Persson pointed to internal divisions in the AfD over its political direction:

The AfD is currently experiencing an internal battle over whether it should be an economically liberal party or a catch-all populist party with a nationalist and protectionist flavour...The key question is whether the ECR will become a powerful bloc for reform and free trade, or a rather incoherent group with an anti-Merkel, anti-liberal economic bias.

3.3 Are there implications for Anglo-German relations?

There has been some concern in the UK that allying with the AfD could damage Anglo-German relations at a particularly sensitive time. The UK Government is seeking German support to carry through EU reform and to oppose the nomination of Jean-Claude Juncker for European Commission President.

Open Europe looked at possible repercussions for the ECR:

... with AfD, as with the DPP and the Finns, there's a big trade-off here: numbers versus image. With the Nordic parties, it was the risk of turning off allies on the liberal right, who are vital to achieving EU reform.

With AfD, it's all about Angela Merkel. She doesn't deal with AfD. In fact, she barely acknowledges its existence. [She once said](#),

"We consider a collaboration [with AfD] to be out of the question."

Merkel wasn't happy when Cameron left the EPP-ED group to form the ECR in 2009. Now, joining forces with her arch-enemy will be like chucking a tank of fuel onto the fire. It will also surprise Berlin, since Number 10 has previously ruled out this possibility. In fact, only in February he [said](#):

"In terms of the parties that are going to join that, we have a sister party in Germany, the CDU/CSU. We're not looking for a new sister party. So I don't anticipate that situation arising at all."

With AfD, the Independent Greeks (interesting to see whether the two of them will get along) and 'Germany-wary' Law & Justice, the new-look ECR could be perceived by some in Berlin as outright anti-Merkel. It's hard to see how this will help Cameron's 'stop Juncker' campaign.

But is it a deal-breaker for a wider [Anglo-German bargain](#) on EU reform? Well, to some extent the European Parliament follows its own logic. And by having Tory MEPs vote against AfD joining, Cameron will seek to convey a “I did what I could” approach. Indeed, if the plan is for the ECR to become a vehicle for pushing a reformist agenda, there was always going to be a time when the group was no longer going to be “owned” by David Cameron.¹⁶

In Germany the AfD affiliation was widely covered in the press on 12 June ([Die Welt](#), [Handelsblatt](#), [Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung](#), [Süddeutsche](#) and [Spiegel](#)).

¹⁵ [EurActiv](#), 12 June 2014.

¹⁶ [Open Europe blog](#), 11 June 2014.

Particular fears have been expressed about the future of the EU-US Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which the UK Government enthusiastically supports. The Danish People's Party, the Finns Party, Law and Justice and the AfD are not TTIP supporters, and Open Europe predicted "there will be a massive struggle within the ECR over whether it wants to be a solid force for EU reform and free trade or a catch-all sceptical block with a penchant for populism, protectionism and illiberal economics". Mats Persson, writing in a [Telegraph blog on 13 June](#), thought the TTIP could be a victim of the ECR's new political composition:

By a quick count, in the new look ECR, around two-thirds of its 63 MEPs either oppose TTIP outright or qualify their support based on the removal of key liberalising measures, such as agriculture or the investor-state dispute resolution mechanism. In other words, Cameron may now stuck with a semi-protectionist group in the EP where a majority opposes one of his key priorities for EU reform.

The sixth round of TTIP talks is in mid-July 2014.

4 Other ECR parties

The Finns Party and Danish People's Party, both of which have controversial histories, but who, according to Conservative MEPs, have cleaned up their act, have joined the ECR group. Both parties attracted criticism [in the UK press](#).¹⁷ The *Financial Times* [reported on 4 June 2014](#) that the Danish extreme-right Morten Messerschmidt and The Finns MEP Jussi Halla-aho have both been convicted for inciting hate or ethnic tensions. According to Jemima Repo, political scientist at the University of Helsinki, "The acceptance of the Finns, along with the Danish People's Party, into the ECR has been primarily seen as an important strategic move by the British Conservatives to isolate Ukip in the European Parliament".¹⁸ According to the *EUObserver* report, Syed Kamall is not perturbed by Hallo-aho's views on Islam.

¹⁷ E.g. [Guardian, 5 June 2014](#), "David Cameron accused over 'dubious' European Union partners".

¹⁸ [EUObserver](#), 16 June 2014