
GREENS TURNING INTO THE NEW POLITICAL CENTRE FORCE, SAYS EUROPEAN GREENS CO-CHAIR

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The rise of the Greens is not to be confused with a shifting majority within the left-wing political spectrum. Instead, it shows that the traditional left-right political divide is getting outdated, European Greens co-chair Reinhard Bütikofer told EURACTIV.com in an exclusive interview.

Commenting on the electoral successes in Bavaria (southern Germany), Belgium and Luxembourg on Sunday (14 October), Bütikofer said that there were few differences between the three Green parties.

What I find exciting is that the Green parties in these three places delivered a narrative that is opposite to the prevailing idea according to which traditional political parties are tumbling down. Fact is that the political centre force is being reshaped, with a shifting towards the Greens, said Bütikofer.

Figures released in Bavaria after the polls closed show that the social-democrats from the SPD lost 210,000 voters in favour of the Green party, while 180,000 CSU voters chose to vote green. The exact same number, 180,000 CSU-voters, chose far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

We cannot therefore speak of a shift of voters within the left wing of the political spectrum. Rather, the centre-left and the centre-right exposed quite remarkably their disorientation, he said.

For Bütikofer, the clear positioning of the Greens in Bavaria, Luxembourg and Belgium was the reason behind their success last Sunday.

Voters knew what we stood and what we stand for, he said.

Core values like tolerance or openness are not the properties of the Greens. Only, they have been left behind by the other parties because of the political pressure coming from the far-right when the Greens clearly stood for them, he added.

The European Greens co-chair also stressed that environmental and climate change issues have risen in the voters political agenda.

Voters understand that climate change is affecting them already, that this is not an issue for the future generation but that it has to be tackled now, he said. He pointed out that the other parties did not take a position on that matter, with the exception of far-right AfD, which has argued mankind does not carry much responsibility for climate change.

Figures released after the Bavarian elections show that the three main topics for the voters were education (52%) and affordable housing (51%), as well as environment and climate change (49%), followed by migration (33%).

Bütikofer also underlined the fact that in the two Benelux countries and Bavaria, the Greens have been taking political responsibilities, be it at local, regional or national level, showing that the Greens are no longer the radical opposition party they used to be.

These elections have refuted the idea that the Greens are an opposition party, he said, adding that the Greens have shown reliability and constancy when taking political responsibilities.

Common political platform for the upcoming European elections

The common political agenda between the different European Green parties will have its own platform, which will showcase a European Green manifesto, Reinhard Bütikofer said.

This platform will present the 10 top priorities of the European Greens, which will be defined at the next Council Meeting to be held 23-25 November in Berlin, he said.

There, the European Green Party delegates will also elect the two-leading candidates that will run for the party in the European elections. Three candidates are running: Petra De Sutter, Senator, nominated by Groen, Belgium; MEP Bas Eickhout, nominated by GroenLinks, the Netherlands; and MEP Ska Keller, nominated by Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Germany.

Asked about the situation for the Green parties in southern and eastern European countries, Bütikofer said he was confident the Greens could perform well as they do not only stick to environmental issues.

I don't know of any Green party in Europe that only focuses on environmental issues, the political programmes always combine different issues and values. And this can be seen in countries such as Slovenia, Bulgaria, Slovakia or Poland, he said.

Kaynak/Source: