

Brexit

Results 'hugely disappointing'

British parties gird for no-deal Brexit battle

LONDON, May 27, (RTRS): Britain's two main parties set the stage on Monday for a battle over a no-deal Brexit, hoping to win back voters who abandoned them for a new movement led by euro-sceptic Nigel Farage and other smaller parties in European elections.

After a punishing night when deepening divisions over Britain's departure from the European Union were plain to see, contenders for the leadership of the governing Conservatives said the results were a demand to deliver Brexit no matter what.

Taking a different tack, the opposition Labour Party said a public vote – a new national election or second referendum – was the way to reunite the country. It pledged to make sure a new Conservative leader would not take Britain out of the EU without a transition deal to help protect the economy.

With Farage's Brexit Party, which prefers a no-deal Brexit, capturing the greatest number of votes for seats in the European Parliament, closely shadowed by a group of fervently pro-EU parties, Conservatives and Labour were under pressure to commit clearly to either side of the debate.

Almost three years since Britain voted narrowly to leave the EU and barely two months after the originally planned departure date, lawmakers remain at loggerheads over how, when or even whether the country will quit the club it joined in 1973.

For the Conservatives, who will appoint a new leader by the end of July, many of the would-be successors see the European vote outcome as proof they must seek a cleaner break with the EU, with several saying they would leave without a deal.

For Labour leader **Jeremy Corbyn**, pressure will mount to embrace a second referendum without qualification – something he has said would be needed to prevent a no-deal Brexit.

But what is clear from a vote which many used as a protest is that Brexit – which forced Prime Minister Theresa May to say she will resign on June 7 after failing to deliver Britain's departure – risks shattering the election prospects of both the main parties.

Former foreign minister Boris Johnson, the favourite to replace May as party leader and prime minister, said the election message was "if we go on like this, we will be fired: dismissed from the job of running the country".

"We can and must deliver. No one sensible would aim exclusively for a no-deal outcome. No one responsible would take no-deal off the table," Johnson, who was also London mayor, said in his regular column in the Telegraph newspaper.

"If we are courageous and optimistic, we can strike a good bargain with our friends across the Channel, come out well and on time – by October 31 – and start delivering on all the hopes and ambitions of the people."

Johnson was one of several prime ministerial contenders to express their belief that the disappointing result in the European vote, which put the Conservatives in fifth position, amounted to a clear demand for Britain to get on with Brexit. May said the results showed the importance of agreeing a deal.

The question posed for the Labour Party was a little different. With part of its support bolting to the Brexit Party and part to the pro-EU Liberal Democrats, who support a second referendum, some felt the pressure to change tack.

Labour's finance chief, John McDonnell, caused a short-lived sensation in seeming to signal a shift in Labour policy to unequivocally back a second referendum on Britain's membership of the EU – something the party has long fought off.

But Corbyn set out the party's position, again saying Labour would do its utmost to prevent a no-deal Brexit – something experts say might be legally trickier than many lawmakers earlier thought if faced with a euro-sceptic prime minister determined to leave the EU by the current deadline of Oct 31.

"This issue will have to go back to the people, whether through a general election or a public vote," Corbyn said in a statement.

After May announced on Friday that she was stepping down, many of her would-be successors have said they wanted Britain to leave the EU with or without a deal.

Challenge

The response seemed to be a direct challenge to Farage, a former commodities broker whose campaigning helped force May's predecessor, David Cameron, to stage the 2016 referendum.

After the Brexit Party came out on top in Sunday's European vote with 31.6% of the vote, the 55-year-old Farage said on Monday he wanted to be included in any new negotiation to leave the EU.

"If we don't leave on Oct 31 then the score that you have seen for the Brexit Party today will be repeated in a general election and we are getting ready for it," he said in Southampton, southern England.

Meanwhile, Britain's Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said on Monday Brexit could only be resolved by taking the issue back to the people, either at a new national election or a public vote.

"With the Conservatives disintegrating and unable to govern, and parliament deadlocked, this issue will have to go back to the people, whether through a general election or a public vote," he said in a statement.

"We will not let the continuing chaos in the Conservative Party push our country into a no deal exit from the EU. Parliament can and will prevent such a damaging outcome for jobs and industry in the UK."

Furthermore, Britain's interior minister Sajid Javid said on Monday his Conservative Party's performance in European elections were "hugely disappointing" and his party needed to unite to deliver Brexit.

"Hugely disappointing results – but this is a verdict on our delivery of Brexit. There's a clear lesson: people want us to get on with it," Javid tweeted.



Jeremy Corbyn



Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage reacts as results are announced at the counting center for the European Elections for the South East England region, in Southampton, England on May 26, 2019. (AP)



Candidate to the presidency of the European Commission, Netherland's Frans Timmermans leaves the stage after speaking at the European Parliament in Brussels on May 27. From Germany and France to Cyprus and Estonia, voters from 21 nations went to the polls Sunday in the final day of a crucial European Parliament election that could see major gains by the far-right, nationalist and populist movements that are on the rise across much of the continent. (AP)



Weber



Sophie

Europe

Court fines 'Sharia police': A German court has found seven men who formed a self-styled "Sharia police" guilty on charges they violated rules on wearing uniforms.

German news agency dpa reported that a court on Monday fined the men, aged between 27 and 37, to penalties of between 300 (335 dollars) and 1,800 euros.

The group took to the streets of the western city of Wuppertal in 2014, dressed in orange vests bearing the words "Sharia police" and handing out leaflets declaring the area a "Sharia-controlled zone" where alcohol, music and pornography were banned under Islam's Sharia law. (RTRS)

Weber to replace Juncker: EU Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen said **Manfred Weber**, who heads the European Parliament's conservative EPP group, was well placed to succeed Jean-Claude Juncker as Commission president.

"I'd say Manfred Weber's position is quite strong at the moment," Katainen told reporters in Helsinki after the EPP retained its status as the largest grouping in the 751-seat legislature, though its share of the vote fell.

Katainen, who was EPP Vice President 2006-2012, also said he could imagine the Greens joining the EPP, the Social Democrats and the liberal Alde alliance in a pro-European coalition at the new European parliament. (RTRS)

Dane to become mayor: A Danish businessman is in the lead to become mayor of Rostock and become the first non-German citizen to head a large city in Germany.

The German news agency dpa reported Monday that 46-year-old Claus Ruhe Madsen received 34.6% in the first round of voting for the mayor's post in the north-eastern Baltic coast city on Sunday.

His closest challenger, Left party candidate Steffen Bockhahn, received 18.9%.

Ruhe Madsen isn't affiliated with a political party but had the support of the center-right Christian Democrats and pro-business Free Democrats. (AP)

France tries Briton: Twenty-

EU

Pro-EU parties remain dominant

Nationalists surge in EU Parliament

BRUSSELS, May 27, (RTRS): Pro-European parties kept a firm grip on the EU parliament on Monday as liberal and green parties matched a surge by euro-sceptic parties, who won control of a quarter of seats in European elections for the first time.

The far-right and nationalists in Italy, Britain, France and Poland came out on top in their national votes on Sunday, shaking up politics at home but failing to dramatically alter the balance of pro-European power in EU assembly.

Facing a more hostile Russia, China's growing economic might and an unpredictable US President Donald Trump, many Europeans appeared to heed a message that the EU needed to stick together to protect workers' rights, free speech and democracy.

"We are going to build a social Europe, a Europe that protects," Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose revival among Spanish voters offset a fall in centre-left support in Germany, told a news conference late on Sunday night.

Investor sentiment was bolstered by the smaller than expected gains by populist parties. However, the drop in support for the main centre-right and centre-left blocs could complicate policymaking and require broader cross-party agreements and discipline, market analysts said.

Provisional results published at 08:18 GMT on Monday showed the Socialists, Greens, liberals and conservatives with 507 of the 751 seats in the EU Parliament, which helps pass laws for more than 500 million Europeans.

The search for a majority, as well as securing the top EU jobs, will now dominate as pro-EU groups seek to shield the EU from anti-establishment forces, who want to break up the world's largest trading bloc but who are split over its future.

French President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Renaissance platform added to gains for liberals at the EU level while support for the Greens surged, giving four groups the pro-EU middle ground and

holding on to two-thirds of seats.

Macron and Sanchez were to meet later on Monday, the first in a series of meetings between EU leaders before they gather for a summit on Tuesday evening in Brussels to discuss the outcome of the parliament vote.

A stronger voice for the liberals and Greens could see the next EU executive seek a tougher line on regulating polluting industries, taxing multinational companies or demanding trading partners help contain climate change.

They could also press EU member states, notably in the east, not to damage civil rights.

Cries of "Europe is back" among voters waving blue and gold EU flags outside European Parliament in Brussels on Sunday night also showed the ebullient mood among Europeans delighted with a sharply higher turnout across the bloc.

Highest

Turnout in the world's second-biggest election rose to 51% from 43% in 2014, its highest in 20 years and the first reverse of falling participation since the first direct EU vote in 1979.

Disenchantment with the European project, which has struggled through economic and migration crises over the past five years, has made the bloc seem distant to voters and anger with the traditional parties was palpable across the bloc.

Riding a wave of anger at the British government's failure to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union, Nigel Farage's Brexit Party won a resounding victory.

The result showed Britain even more polarised over its Brexit divorce, nearly three years since a 2016 referendum in which it voted 52% to 48% to leave.

While Britain's departure from the bloc will require its EU lawmakers to give up their seats, Farage's party and its allies won 29 seats, the same number as Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right European

People's Party in Germany.

In Italy, the far-right League became Italy's largest party, giving greater authority to its leader Matteo Salvini who is pushing for swingeing tax cuts in defiance of EU budget rules.

Poland's euro-sceptic ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) also came out ahead. In France, Marine Le Pen's anti-immigration, anti-Brussels National Rally edged Macron's pro-European centrist movement. Far-right separatists also saw support surge in Belgium.

Provisional results for the EU Parliament put the EPP on 182 seats, ahead of the S&D on 147, with the liberals on 109, up 41 seats, and Greens on 69, up 17. On the far-right, two groups in the parliament had well over a 100 seats, a 40% jump from 2014.

Three existing euro-sceptic groups, including those of Le Pen and Salvini's League, will make up about 25% of the chamber, up from around 20 percent in the current parliament.

With four, rather than two, centrist alliances in the assembly, it is less clear who will be the next head of the Commission. Guntram Wolff, the director of think-tank Bruegel, told Reuters. "First the parliament needs a coalition agreement on substance and personalities," he said.

That agreement should include more humane immigration policies and tackling climate change, said Maria Nyman, secretary general of charity Caritas Europa.

Leaders for the four pro-EU centre parties were set to hold their first talks on Monday and there will be weeks and possibly months of hard bargaining over who will run EU institutions.

Parliament says one of its members should succeed Jean-Claude Juncker as president of the executive European Commission but many national leaders, who will meet for dinner in Brussels on Tuesday, have said they will not be bound by that demand.

two years after the battered body of French film producer **Sophie Toscan du Plantier** was found near her holiday home in Ireland, the murder trial of suspect Ian Bailey will begin in France on Monday.

Neither Bailey nor his lawyers will attend proceedings, his lawyers said. Bailey, who is British, says he is innocent and Ireland's Supreme Court has ruled he cannot be extradited.

Toscan du Plantier, whose husband Daniel was a leading producer and worked with renowned film-makers including Federico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman, was killed while on holiday in the small coastal village of Schull, in south-western Ireland, in December 1996. Her murder shocked Ireland and cast a shadow over the idyllic rural setting of Schull, a popular hideaway for bohemian English, French and German expatriates.

Bailey's lawyers said his abrasive personality, as well as his claims to have had information

about the murder, contributed to the journalist and poet ending up being suspected of murder.

"We think a judicial mistake is unfolding before us. Ian Bailey was presumed guilty for the past 22 years," his French lawyer Dominique Tricaud told journalists in Paris. (RTRS)

4 suspects arrested: French police have arrested four suspects following a blast in the city of Lyon that wounded 13 people last week, authorities said Monday.

TV footage showed a police operation underway Monday in a small town outside Lyon involving officers wearing ski masks. Police had launched a large manhunt after a device exploded Friday on a busy pedestrian street in France's third-largest city.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner announced the first arrest on Twitter, a development later confirmed by Paris prosecutors,

who handle all terrorism-related cases.

The prosecutors' office later said three other suspects, including a woman, were detained and formally arrested. According to French media, they included the mother and the brother of the main suspect.

Lyon mayor Gerard Collomb, a former interior minister, said one of the suspects is an IT student who was arrested as he stepped off a bus.

"It's a relief for all Lyon inhabitants. I believe the case has been resolved," Collomb told BFM TV. "If there was a network, it has been identified and will certainly be dismantled."

French President Emmanuel Macron has called the explosion an "attack" but no group has claimed responsibility for the explosion yet. An investigation has been opened for "attempted murder in relation with a terrorist undertaking" and "criminal terrorist association."

Last week, France's counter-terrorism prosecutor, Remy Heitz, described video surveillance that showed a suspect heading toward the center of Lyon on a bike Friday afternoon. The man was seen arriving on foot, pushing his bike along a pedestrian-only street, then leaving a paper bag on a concrete block in the middle of the street near a bakery.

The suspect immediately returned to his bike and left the same way. One minute later, the explosion shattered the glass of a refrigerator in the bakery, Heitz said. Regional authorities said the 13 wounded suffered mostly minor injuries.

It was unclear whether the suspect first arrested Monday was the same person, although Collomb said the detained student was identified thanks to video surveil-

lance. (AP)

Austria's Kurz faces axe: Austria's parliament appeared all but certain to sack conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on Monday after lawmakers from the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) agreed to support a motion of no-confidence in his caretaker government.

Kurz's People's Party came out on top in Sunday's European Parliament election, only a week after a video sting scandal prompted far-right Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache to step down and Kurz to scrap the coalition between their parties.

Kurz now heads a caretaker government that he hopes to use as a springboard for re-election, presenting himself as more of a victim of the political crisis set off by the video than an enabler of it who brought the far right to power.

But with the next election expected in September, opposition parties say Kurz must share the blame, and they moved in parliament to deposit what is effectively a minority government in which FPÖ ministers were replaced by civil servants.

"The Kurz government has failed," the Social Democrats' (SPO) deputy parliamentary faction head Joerg Leichtfried said in a speech to parliament, minutes before his party submitted the motion. "Kurz gambled away his chances and, Mr Chancellor, you bear full responsibility."

FPÖ lawmakers earlier unanimously agreed to support the SPO motion, several of those who attended a party meeting told reporters.

The two parties have 103 seats combined in the 183-seat lower house of parliament, easily giving them the majority required for the motion to pass. (RTRS)



Far-right National Party leader Marine le Pen delivers a speech at the campaign headquarters on May 26, 2019 in Paris. French polling agency estimates show far-right National Rally expected to beat Macron's party in European elections. (AP)