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Reactions to the shift to the right

All of Europe is talking about the EU elections. But what does the rest of the world think of the results? We report from Argentina, the US and Nigeria

Argentina

From Buenos Aires, Brussels is around 11 000 kilometres away. Even though Argentina sees itself as a country of immigration that is proud of its European roots and feels closer to the old continent than other South American countries, the elections to the European Parliament were hardly worth a headline here. President Javier Milei, who sees himself in a strange dual role as both a 'state-subverting mole' in the state apparatus *and* its president, is keeping the crisis-ridden society on tenterhooks with his radical initiatives, meaning that Argentinians are primarily preoccupied with themselves and the economic situation. In addition, the president is not interested in traditional foreign policy and has already fallen out with numerous other heads of state such as Colombian President Gustavo Petro and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez during his short time in office. In the international arena, you can imagine that he is about as popular as a schoolmate who constantly bullies others.

But thanks to the announcement of early elections in France on election night, the European elections have made it into the news after all. The strong result of the right-wing nationalist party *Rassemblement National,* led by Marine Le Pen, is a topic that also resonates here, as Argentina has been ruled by a libertarian populist for six months. Nevertheless, the Argentinian version of the far right under Milei is a special one. It remains to be seen whether the anarcho-capitalist president will find common interests with a possibly right-wing conservative Europe that will lead to concrete changes in Argentinian-European relations.

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the election campaign, rhetoric was used to invoke the 'fight for freedom', opposition to socialism and communism, Agenda 2030, gender ideology, 'Islamic' immigration and the defence of national sovereignty and identity. Although Milei is ideologically close to the European right on many of these issues, it is primarily economic and trade issues that are at the centre of the agenda between Argentina and Europe.

In the area of trade policy, common interests would be a real game changer, as negotiations on the EU-Mercosur Agreement between Europe and the South American countries of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay have yet to be finalised. Milei wants to open up the country, which is rich in natural resources and agricultural goods, to foreign investors. He had recently signalled his willingness to sign the agreement in the near future, but it was primarily French President Emmanuel Macron who, under the impression of the farmers' protests in his country, rejected the agreement as he feared competitive disadvantages for domestic producers. Le Pen also shares this position.

Milei celebrates his alleged influence on the triumph of the right in Europe, but on closer inspection, there are considerable differences between the various currents, especially on the question of how the relationship between the state and the market should be organised. For the majority of Argentinians, on the other hand, a completely different issue is at the heart of the matter. Above all, it is important to them that they can continue to enter the Schengen area without a visa.

Svenja Blanke and Ingrid Ross, FES Buenos Aires

United States of America

'Are these truly important elections?' asks New York journalist Jennifer Kirby in astonishment. She is visibly irritated when she learns that the outcome of the European Parliament elections will have no consequences for the German parties in terms of personnel. Americans who deal with EU elections find it strange that Germans can only vote for party lists. Parliamentarians who have no responsibility to constituencies simply do not exist in the US. Are German MEPs really committed to the citizens if they need the approval of their own party to be placed on the list?

Even among those with an interest in politics, there is a certain distance to these elections, which are so different and difficult to understand,

especially as the election campaign seemed almost apolitical from a US perspective. As a result, the European elections receive far less attention in the US than vice versa. This is because in Europe, as in the rest of the world, people are watching the drama of the US elections in November with fascination. Of course, this is also because the outcome of the presidential election will have direct implications for Europe's security and prosperity.

Political America is primarily concerned with the European elections in the context of its own elections. In particular, the shift to the right and the increasing political violence in Germany and other European countries are causing great concern against the backdrop of Donald Trump's renewed candidacy. The outcome of the EU parliamentary elections is partly seen as a forewarning for the upcoming US elections. For example, the veteran political columnist E.J. Dionne wrote in the *Washington Post* on the day of the election: 'They warn us that flirting with authoritarianism never ends well.'

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The elections were also closely followed in the White House. Concerns about a European shift to the right had been voiced in US government circles in recent weeks. The major successes of the far right in Germany and France and President Macron's decision to dissolve the French parliament are now a reality and a source of uncertainty for the Biden administration and the Democrats. Will the most important partners possibly weaken on crucial issues or be too preoccupied with themselves? The Republicans, on the other hand, are hoping that the Trump effect has found its way into Europe.

From the perspective of liberal America, the EU was seen as a stronghold of liberal values and an anchor of stability, especially during the Trump years. The election results now suggest that this perception may be deceptive. The new composition of the European Parliament shows the direction in which Europe could be heading politically — nationalism and right-wing populist to far-right politics are gaining favour. From the Biden administration's point of view, this is not a good path for the transatlantic partners. There is a real danger that democracy and the liberal world order will increasingly falter on both sides of the Atlantic. And this danger is serious, as America's right-wing conservatives and right-wing extremists are increasingly networking with their European counterparts. The democratic majority in the European Parliament should swiftly seek and sustainably strengthen co-operation with liberal

America — with the Democrats and the remaining moderate Republicans.

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Nigeria

In Nigeria, Africa's largest country with a population of around 223 million, the European elections received little attention. The country, which is over two and a half times the size of Germany, is too preoccupied with its own problems: The current massive increases in the cost of living and growing insecurity in large parts of the country characterise people's everyday lives.

The government under President Bola Tinubu celebrated its first anniversary just a few weeks ago. His comprehensive economic reforms – above all the abolition of the petrol price subsidy and the abolition of the state-mandated exchange rate – hold out the hope of stabilising the economy in the long term. In the short term, however, as the reforms were introduced without any social compensation measures, they have fuelled inflation in the country (most recently 33 per cent) and made life even more difficult for Nigerians.

The current minimum wage of 30 000 naira per month (approx. €19) is not even enough to cover the transport costs for many people to get to work. The trade unions therefore organised a general strike last week. At the same time, the difficult economic situation in the country, which is largely dependent on oil exports, is increasing insecurity. Attacks, violent disputes over fertile land and commercial kidnappings are on the rise.

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Nevertheless, the European elections are not insignificant for the 'Giant of Africa'. Many of the investments that the government wants to attract at all costs could be made by European companies. Nigeria also offers itself as a sales market for European products and as an exporter of gas, agricultural products and (processed) raw materials to Europe. Currently, around half of Nigeria's crude oil and gas exports go to Europe. As one of the most populous countries in the world, with 70 per cent of the population under the age of 30, Nigeria is also a potential partner for Europe in attracting skilled workers. Alongside the US and Canada, the EU is a popular destination for

many students and, in some cases, highly qualified professionals from Nigeria.

The shift to the right that the current election results in Europe represent is only being noticed by a small, educated and internationally well-connected group in Nigeria. This mainly young and urban section of society is concerned about a possible tightening of the European Union's migration policy, which is already perceived as restrictive. Even for well-off people from Nigeria, visiting relatives and friends in London, Paris or Berlin on holiday is still a major challenge due to the restrictive visa policy.

For the EU, Nigeria is not only relevant due to its economic potential and wealthy population, but also because of its geopolitical importance. As an anchor of stability in the Sahel, Nigeria – unlike other states in the fragile region – is relatively independent of foreign influence, particularly from Russia and China, due to its size and complexity. As a country that is fundamentally orientated towards the West, it is an important partner for shaping a multilateral world order despite its democratic deficits. However, in order for Nigeria to turn its gaze from the inside out, it must first get a grip on its own problems.

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