

11.5.2016 Three in a row for the SNP!

For the third consecutive time, the SNP will lead the Scottish government, at the head of a very large majority. Nicola Sturgeon, who will be a candidate for re-election as first minister, has announced her plans: to relaunch the referendum process in order to achieve independence for Scotland. Elsewhere, the results for other EFA parties in the UK - while not as striking as those in Scotland - are also very encouraging, especially in the case of Plaid Cymru in Wales.

There are 129 seats in the Scottish parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh, filled by a voting system in which every voter receives two ballot papers: one for the Scotland-wide election, where MPs are chosen by proportional representation, and the other to elect a representative for the voter's own constituency, of which there are 73. Once these 73 MPs are directly elected, the remaining 56 seats are allocated to the regional lists presented by each party. With nearly 42% of the vote, the SNP obtained 63 seats. It took 59 of the 73 constituencies, and four other MPs were elected via the proportional list. It missed the absolute majority of 65 by just two seats.

The SNP has been the party in power in Scotland for two terms. It had a relative majority of 41 seats in 2007 and roughly 630,000 votes (31%), and an absolute majority of 69 seats in 2011 with around 875,000 votes (44%); it has now won a very large relative majority of 63 seats in 2016 with about 950,000 votes (41.7%).

The surprise this time around is the surge of the Conservatives, who have outstripped Labour, something which seemed unthinkable in the past. With around half as many votes as the SNP, this pro-union block is still lagging far behind, but it signals that the part of the electorate that is most opposed to independence and most Eurosceptic is rallying to the party in power in London. Of the other parties, a sharp rise for the pro-independence Greens ensures a large majority of seats for nationalist ideas.

The constant presence of the SNP at the head of Scotland's affairs over three consecutive terms of office reveals the relevance of this nationalist party's policies, which puts social action at the heart of its priorities. In Scotland as nowhere else, the health system is supported, students are protected against the elitist policies that dominate in London, energy policy is in the forefront of the use of renewables, and providing childcare facilities and social services for families are priorities, along with promoting the integration of immigrants. There is no question but that the SNP is the party in Europe which conducts the most exemplary social policy, despite the limited powers of devolved government, whereas the parties of the left in the EU, starting with France but in Italy and elsewhere too, have generally given up.

The other SNP priority is its pro-European stance, and, in a very euro-sceptic UK, not least in the major broadcast and written media, this fight is particularly courageous. At the time of the British referendum on Brexit, Scotland is affirming its support for the European project, if necessary by declaring its independence if London, instead of the Scottish people, should decide to leave the Union.

For the EFA, the other good news from these elections is the progress of Plaid Cymru, especially its leader Leanne Wood, elected in a previously staunch Labour constituency. The Labour party has lost its absolute majority and has started talks with Plaid Cymru, which could see its return to regional government.

The elections of 5 May in the United Kingdom have strengthened the processes of emancipation of the peoples of Europe. Scotland remains a locomotive for us all, with the SNP in power again for the third consecutive time. And note this, because it matters to us: there are four places in Europe where nationalist parties run the local authorities: Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country... and Corsica.