Citizens across the European Union were voting Sunday to pick their direct representatives to Brussels in an election likely to affect the bloc’s future beyond the European Parliament’s five-year mandate. Gabriele Steinhauser reports.

BRUSSELS—Anti-European Union and far-right parties posted strong gains in elections to the European Parliament in some countries on Sunday, tapping into voter anger over economic austerity and delivering a blow to institutions in Brussels, national governments and mainstream political parties.

Anti-EU or euroskeptic parties won the biggest share of the vote in France—where a quarter of the votes were cast for the far-right National Front—as well as the U.K., Greece and Denmark, according to early results.

Overall, centrist, pro-European parties are still expected to hold a broad majority of the 751 seats in the new legislature, which decides on EU laws together with national governments. But euroskeptic and anti-EU lawmakers could complicate passing measures on which mainstream parties are divided, including a planned free-trade deal with the U.S.

The center-right European People's Party, or EPP, is expected to hold 212 seats in the new Parliament, down from 274 seats, followed by the center-left Socialists & Democrats, with 186 seats, down from 196. The free-market Alliance of Liberals & Democrats was projected to get 70 seats, down from 83, while the Greens will send 55 delegates to Brussels, down two from the previous elections in 2009.

Those European parties group together delegates from like-minded national parties, although some parties have so far remained unaffiliated. According to the first projections, there will be 107 so-far unaffiliated lawmakers—many of them anti-EU or euroskeptic—in the new Parliament.

European Elections

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Portugal's Socialists Emerge as Strongest Party
Mainstream Parties Seen Holding Ground in Finland
Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny Says Voter Anger Hits Coalition

"The sovereign people have declared they want to take back the reins of their destiny," said Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front, which was projected to win 25% of the vote in France. "Our people demand just one politics. The politics of the French, for the French."

The first European elections after a yearslong debt crisis underline how unpopular bailouts and austerity measures have eroded the standing of an institution that helps govern more than 500 million people and one of the world's biggest economies. Many voters say they blame the EU for mandating harsh spending cuts and economic overhauls that have contributed to high unemployment across the EU.

The results also will put pressure on national governments to pull back powers from Brussels and demand curbs on migration between EU countries.

**European Elections 2014: Live Results**

Over the past four days, about 400 million citizens across the European Union's 28 member states had the chance to elect a new European Parliament. [Here are the live projections and results from the European Parliament.](#)

In France, the National Front's showing dealt a blow to President François Hollande, whose Socialists only got 14%, also trailing the center-right UMP.

Martin Schulz, the German who led the European Socialists into the elections, said the National Front's success in France had to be taken seriously by pro-EU parties. "The reason is not that people are hard-core extremists," Mr. Schulz told reporters in Brussels. "They are disappointed. They have lost trust and hope."

In Greece, leftist Syriza, which opposes the austerity measures required by its international bailout program, got 27% of the vote, beating the center-right New Democracy of Premier Antonis Samaras, which stood at 23%. The extreme-right Golden Dawn party received 9% of the vote, according to projections from the Greek interior ministry.
The U.K. Independence Party, which wants Britain to leave the EU, was the biggest force in the U.K. Provisional results suggested more than 27% of voters cast their ballots for UKIP.

In other countries, the elections brought some comfort to governing parties. In Italy, the center-left Democrat Party led by young Prime Minister Matteo Renzi garnered 41% of the vote, according to projections by Italian pollster SWG for SkyTG24. The vote would mark a major success for Mr. Renzi, who is facing his first electoral test after stepping into power in February following a party coup.

The antiestablishment Five-Star Movement headed by former comedian Beppe Grillo, won about 21.5% of the vote, below the 25.5% it garnered in February's general elections.

"I voted for the Five-Star Movement, because I feel that the center-right doesn't represent me anymore," said Alessio Paratore, 27 years old, after casting his vote in Rome. "They keep blabbing and promising, but they ended up doing nothing concrete."

In Germany, the EU's largest country, provisional results showed a win for Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democrats and Christian Socialists, with 35% of the vote, ahead of the Social Democrats, with 27%. The euroskeptic AfD, running for the first time in European elections, was seen taking 7%.

The parliamentary elections may have a longer-term impact on another key EU institution: the European Commission. For this election, major EU parties have nominated pan-European lead candidates to head their campaigns and run for commission president.

Until now, the president was selected by EU leaders, while the Parliament only got a yes-or-no vote. The commission is the only EU institution with the right to propose new laws. But the leading parties have argued that the lead candidate of the largest party in Parliament should be the next commission president—despite the opposition of some EU governments.

With the EPP's victory, the chances that Jean-Claude Juncker, the former prime minister of Luxembourg and the party's top candidate, would get the job appeared to improve Sunday.

Mr. Juncker was also endorsed by David McAllister, who headed the CDU's list in Germany. "We want Jean-Claude Juncker to become the next president of the European Commission," he told supporters. It is the most vocal endorsement for Mr. Juncker from a close ally of Ms. Merkel.

Initial estimates suggested that the nomination of lead candidates failed to boost overall turnout, with some 43% of eligible voters casting ballots—unchanged from 2009. While turnout improved in some countries, including France and Germany, it plummeted in others, including to a record-low 13% in Slovakia.

—Viktoria Dendrinou in Brussels, Giada Zampano in Rome, Nick Winning in London, Harriet Torry in Berlin, Alkman Granitsas in Athens and Stacy Meichtry in Paris contributed to this article.

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