TA Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: The Editorial Board

Europe is not sliding towards the extreme right – election results more convincing than a moral panic

After last Sunday's elections in Spain, where none of the participants won a clear majority to form a government, it may be time to reconsider the omnipresent, even panicked, thesis that the extreme right is overrunning Europe.

Spain's right-wing parties, despite high expectations, failed to win enough seats in parliament to form a government on their own in last Sunday's elections.

The far-right party Vox, that was considered the main partner of the conservatives from the People's Party, failed, so the country is entering a new round of political calculations and uncertainty.

One of the most significant events in last Sunday's elections was the fiasco of Vox, which won 33 seats, 19 fewer than it had in the previous parliament.

No matter how the post-election combinations end up, voters in Spain have shown an unequivocal commitment to the traditional mainstream parties - current Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's Socialists and the People's Party's conservatives.

These two biggest electoral competitors will control as much as three-quarters of the parliament (about 73%), confirming that voters in Spain are still moderate and averse to extreme political options, which has been their tradition throughout the post-Franco period.

Extremists remain on the side-lines

Proving that Europe is under a "wave" or "invasion" of the extreme right has usually (and quickly) focused only on the growth of these parties and movements without focusing on the results of traditional, mainstream parties.

However, the Spanish example has shown that the growth of extreme right-wing policies in Europe remains on the margins and rarely reaches the path that leads to genuine power.

The recent elections in Greece were also monitored through the prism of the entry of extreme right-wing parties into the parliament. Their role remains marginal, and the victory of the New Democracy of former Prime Minister Kyrios Mitsotakis was more than convincing.

The fear of the invasion of the extreme right grew stronger because of the advancement of the German Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The latest panic follows their victory in the Sonneberg district elections, the AfD's first contact with executive power at any level.

The Sonneberg district is one of the smallest districts in Germany. It has only 57,000 inhabitants, so the question remains whether AfD‘s result is a true sign of its growth or whether, 10 years after its founding, they are still unattainably far from any power that would change Germany according to the standards of their politics.

After the UK, no one left the EU

It is true that right-wing parties, mainly conservatives from the centre, have been successful in the last few elections in Europe, in Sweden and Finland, for example. And in Italy also.

But due to the rise of centre-right parties, sometimes with the help of the far-right, none

of these EU members have relinquished the main trends present when they came to power - adherence to the EU (and NATO), first of all.

The excitement over the growth of far-right politics in Europe, and at the same time, their inability to reach a level where they could implement their policies, is reminiscent of the moral panic across Europe after Brexit.

Analysts raced to predict who would be the next to leave the EU after the UK, and the suffix “exit” became fashionable - Frexit (France), Italexit (Italy), Nexit (Netherlands). None of this happened, and the UK-style suffix has been forgotten.

A similar case of forgetting is likely the current fears that the extreme right will take over one European government at a time and consequently lead the continent towards disintegration and xenophobia, both social and economic.

The right-wing blade dulls when it achieves power

A series of elections in several European countries showed two regularities. The first is that extremist policies are still too far from a position to influence the mainstream, and the second, is that their blade dulls even when they get the opportunity to implement their policy.

The coming to power of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's right-wing coalition in Italy is the best proof that some policies were misinterpreted as extreme while they were rising to power. They corrected their extremes during the exercise of power and evolved to the position of a moderate conservative centre.

Voters across the EU are simply opposed to extremist policies, and last Sunday's election in Spain was the latest proof.

Surveys also show that the EU popularity amongst its voters is still extremely high, and even two-thirds (63%) say they are optimistic about the future of the Union (Eurobarometer spring survey).

The main points of extreme-right policies remain far from being realised: the weakening of the EU and the strengthening of national sovereignty, anti-migrant policies, anti-globalist ideas, opposition to multi-ethnicity, and intolerance towards the LGBT population.

Europe is simply not sliding into a far-right, isolationist and xenophobic (often racist) political extreme, as is often interpreted.

These policies exist on the European stage, but voters persistently fail to give them an opportunity to become mainstream policies.

The series of elections in European countries this year, ending with last Sunday's elections in Spain, clearly showed this and announced a similar outcome in the elections for the European Parliament next spring.