

# **The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament Country Reports**

**Edited by Wojciech Gagatek**



European  
Union  
Democracy  
Observatory



European  
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Institute



**The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament  
Country Reports**

**Edited by Wojciech Gagatek**

**Foreword by Yves Mény**

**European University Institute  
Florence, Italy**

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## FOREWORD

*Yves Mény, President of the European University Institute 2002-2009*

The European University Institute (EUI) was set up in 1972 by the six founding Member States of the European Communities to provide advanced academic training to doctoral researchers and to promote research at the highest level. It opened its doors to its first researchers in 1976. This event preceded the first direct elections to the European Parliament of 1979 by only three years. Although politicians and the leading European elite welcomed these elections with great hope, the electorate did not attach much importance to them, and soon afterwards political scientists began to refer to them as second-order elections.

Today, the EUI is a world-class postgraduate and postdoctoral research institute for Economics, History, Law, and Political and Social Sciences. Comparative Europe-focused research has always been at the forefront of our activities. Prior to the 2009 elections to the European Parliament, we successfully embarked on two large research projects. First, the European Union Democracy Observatory (EUDO), a new and blossoming research centre based at the Institute, launched the unique innovative voting aid application EU Profiler. More than 2.5 million European citizens visited this website in search of information about the programme profiles of the political parties competing in the 2009 elections. Secondly, the EUI is hosting the large interdisciplinary research project PIREDEU (Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union). This project is perhaps the largest and most comprehensive analysis of the European Parliamentary elections to date, and its preliminary results will become available in the course of the year 2010.

However, we wish to go beyond that. One of our objectives for the future will be to communicate more often with the world of practice, and hopefully, also with ordinary citizens. The EUI has the ambition of playing an important role in building civil society and in bringing the EU closer to its citizens. Based on this premise, a group of young scholars both from the EUI and from all over the EU has engaged in preparing this publication devoted to the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. The publication is innovative in several regards. First of all, I am very pleased that 5 introductory chapters and 24 standardized country reports contained in this eBook were written by young members of our academic community. Throughout my presidency of the EUI, I have always tried to create conditions for young academics to develop and flourish, and I am very happy that we created an opportunity for them to be engaged in a comparative research project of this kind. It must be emphasized that the initiative to prepare the publication came from these young academics, who correctly identified a gap in the availability to those interested of reliable well-researched academic analysis of this election. From the very beginning, our idea was to put the entire eBook on-line and to provide unlimited access to it. We therefore hope that it will become a useful source of reference for academia, the media and the wider public.

In the next few years, European politicians will need to thoroughly rethink how to bridge the gap between the EU and ordinary citizens and how to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the Union. The EUI is ready to be fully engaged in this debate, and through such initiatives as EUDO and the results of our research, we will continue to provide viable academic explanations

of, and solutions to, the well-known deficiencies in EU democracy. I am confident that the next President of the EUI, Josep Borrell Fontelles, a former president of the European Parliament, will continue to build close links between academia and the world of practice with a view to finding solutions to many of the problems that the EU is facing at this time.

## PREFACE: BRINGING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION RESULTS CLOSER TO THE CITIZENS

*Wojciech Gagatek, Alexander H. Trechsel and Fabian Breuer<sup>1</sup>*

The European Parliament elections are a fascinating, and at the same time slightly disappointing, event. What fascinates is the sheer size of the electorate (350 million) and the number of parties running in the campaign (more than 300); what disappoints is that these parties run campaigns on totally different issues, based on national, rather than European themes. Despite the continuing strengthening of the Parliament, citizens do not pay much attention to these elections, parties fight low-profile dull campaigns, and the media are not much interested either. The list of fascinations and disappointments could be much longer, as political scientists have produced vast volumes explaining the overall nature of these elections (see Gagatek in this volume).

In this context, the 2009 EP elections of June 4-7 seem to confirm the steady trends observed since the first direct elections to the European Parliament of 1979. Political scientists often refer to the second-order or even third-order character of the elections, which altogether describes their relative unimportance. Overall, turnout is much lower than in national elections; if people go to the polls, then they often use their vote to sanction their national governments; small and relatively unimportant, or newly established, parties tend to receive surprisingly large support in EP elections; and finally, parties fight their campaigns on national, rather than European issues.

Obviously there are some new developments which cannot be dismissed. Politically speaking, the 2009 result brings a new Parliament looking to the right of the political spectrum, with the left quite heavily beaten in most EU member states. Second, the new arrival of nationalist and extreme parties is argued to be a sign of popular disillusionment. However, these populist and extremist parties, even though they make a lot of fuss and attract large media interest, hardly ever sit within a single political group in the Parliament, and therefore, are barely able to influence the way the Parliament works and the kind of decisions it takes.

### **The role for political scientists**

Every five years, both politicians and academics try to come up with ideas to improve the above-mentioned deficiencies. How to increase turnout? How to best communicate the benefits of European integration? How to make the Parliament a more interesting place? With the Lisbon Treaty in force, the Parliament will have more powers and its role in the Union will further increase. The need to come up with suggestions on how to get citizens more interested in the only democratically elected institution of the EU will then be even more pressing. However, what can academics do to help redress some of the failures of these elections? Is there any role for political scientists, such as the three of us signed below?

---

<sup>1</sup> Wojciech Gagatek, Lecturer in European Politics, University of Warsaw, Collaborator for the EUDO Observatory on Political Parties and Representation; Alexander H. Trechsel, Swiss Chair Professor in Federalism and Democracy, European University Institute, Florence, EUDO Director; Fabian Breuer, Project Assistant of EUDO and EU-Profler coordinator, European University Institute, Florence.

We strongly believe that the role of academics should be extended, and should not only focus on explaining things post-factum, but actually on helping voters to make their choice. For many years political scientists have observed that party programmes have converged, so that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish one party's programme from another. Furthermore, voters do not have enough interest or time to study party programmes. In effect, they are often left without clear ideas of who to vote for. This is one of the reasons why the number of undecided voters is getting higher each election. Some of them often refrain from voting, precisely because they do not know who to vote for and what options they have to choose from.

This is why a group of political scientists from the European University in Florence launched a revolutionary internet voting-aid application – the EU Profiler – before these EP elections. The EU Profiler,<sup>2</sup> which was launched at the end of April 2009, was the only Europe-wide voting advice application for the 2009 European Parliament elections, and was available in all the national EU languages. It was customised to each country's national campaign context and included almost 300 European parties, which were coded according to 30 political statements in 9 policy categories. To do this, party programmes and similar sources were analysed and documented. The tool allowed voters to compare their own policy preferences with those of their national parties by answering a simple questionnaire. Based on this, the EU Profiler provided users with textual and graphical representations of parties' stances compared to their own positions. It also enabled the academic team to shed new pan-continental light on public opinion, voting behaviour, campaign dynamics, party cohesion and political participation (see Breuer in this volume for more details).

However, the second, parallel aspect of our perceived role is to explain this election to the wider public. A huge part of the citizenry expects comparative, reliable information on this election. Other groups in society, including politicians and journalists may also like to have clear, succinct, and understandable analyses which they can use in their own work. With the eBook that you are reading at this moment, we rise to these expectations. We thought that it would be a pity not to use the efforts of so many academics engaged in the EU Profiler project to produce a publication about the results of these elections. This is why we have decided to prepare short country reports analyzing EP elections in each country comparatively.

### **eBook structure**

We open this eBook with five introductory chapters. By analyzing these elections through the lenses of the second-order election thesis, Alexander H. Trechsel argues that they confirm the thesis while, at the same time, representing the first real European elections in terms of their political outcome. Mainly due to the current economic crisis Europe witnesses an electoral convergence at both the national and the European levels of party competition. Wojciech Gagattek looks at the campaign patterns, trying to identify how these elections were fought and what new aspects they brought. Lutz Meyer presents and assesses the effects of the information campaign that the European Parliament commissioned from Scholz and Friends PR Agency, in which he himself plays a key role. Fabian Breuer presents the EU Profiler and the problems that this project faced when analyzing party programmes in more detail. Finally, Wojciech Gagattek introduces the political composition of the newly elected Parliament and speculates on how it can influence the way it works.

These chapters serve as introduction to 24 country reports prepared mostly by young political scientists. Each chapter is relatively short (5-6 pages), and follows the same structure, being composed of four clearly-defined sections: Background, Issues, The election campaign and Results. The brief section entitled Background contextualizes the election campaign by bringing in the most recent national election results, presenting the political scene and by briefly covering the general political atmosphere in the first half of 2009. The next section, entitled Issues, presents the reader with an account of the themes of the campaign, especially covering the areas on which political parties differed. In other words, the aim of this section is to give the reader a basic understanding of party approaches and policies on European integration, and

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.euprofiler.eu](http://www.euprofiler.eu).

additionally voters' perception of the EU and of the European Parliament. In the third section, entitled The election campaign, we look at party campaign strategies and campaign dynamics. What kind of activities and means of communication did different parties prefer? What kinds of candidates were presented to the voters? What role did European political parties play during the campaign? Finally, the section entitled Results offers tentative explanations of the turnout (especially if it was lower than expected) and presents the results. Does this election mark continuity with the 2004 election? How can the gains and losses of various parties be explained? What will the direct consequences of this election be for national politics? We believe that framed in such a way, these chapters build a coherent picture of EP election development. All the above chapters were written in the period between June and October 2009.

We believe that our eBook will be particularly useful to non-academics, such as politicians, journalists and, last but not least, ordinary people. We particularly wanted to avoid using difficult academic vocabulary or sophisticated statistical analyses so that these chapters are understandable to everybody. However, more interested readers will be given a chance to focus much more deeply on the election results once the first fully-blown academic analyses emerge.



**Section I**  
**Introduction**





## 1

## HOW MUCH 'SECOND-ORDER' WERE THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 2009?

Alexander H. Trechsel<sup>1</sup>

In this contribution I will briefly examine a 30 year-old patient: the European Parliament elections and their most recent results of June 2009. What is produced on a new born baby within minutes of its birth – the test of its vital functions, known as the APGAR test – took a full year in the case of the EP elections. One year after the first EP elections of 1979, Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt published a seminal article in the *European Journal of Political Research*. They became immediately aware that the 1979 EP elections were different from national elections: they were held as a set of simultaneous national elections, less important, however, than the latter and more particularly, less important than 'first order' elections. For Reif and Schmitt, "first-order elections in parliamentary systems are the national parliamentary elections, and in presidential systems, the national presidential elections". In all western democracies, these first-order elections are complemented by second-order elections, such as "by-elections, municipal elections, various sorts of regional elections, those to a 'second chamber' and the like".<sup>2</sup> Parting from this observation, they developed a systematic, analytical framework for diagnosing the 'second order' character of the EP elections.

Reif and Schmitt were then the very first to detect symptoms of anomalies in the electoral newborn. Contrary to sub-national second order elections, there was even less at stake in these trans-national EP elections. Hence, involvement and participation (in Reif and Schmitt's terms) were expected to be even lower than in other second-order elections. Generally, the 'less-at-stake' dimension of the second-order model would lead to pathologically low levels of participation (turnout), particularly bright prospects for small and new parties, particularly elevated percentages of invalid ballots as well as strongly losing governing parties. Their empirical results confirmed this state of affairs for the 1979 elections and, largely, for all subsequent EP elections.<sup>3</sup>

But what about the 2009 EP elections, is there any sign of weakening of the second-order character, or to the contrary, are these elections even more second-order than before? Thirty years ago, for Reif and Schmitt, the fact that the first EP elections were held in a "new and unfamiliar arena" made these elections particularly vulnerable to second-order characteristics.<sup>4</sup> Today, with EP elections having matured, one could hypothesise that the arena is now much better known than thirty years ago,<sup>5</sup> that there is much more at stake than 30 years ago and

<sup>1</sup> Swiss Chair Professor in Federalism and Democracy, European University Institute, Florence; EUDO Director.

<sup>2</sup> K. Reif & H. Schmitt, 'Nine Second Order National Elections. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Elections Results', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 8 (1), 1980, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> M. Marsh, 'Testing the Second-Order Election Model after Four European Elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 28 (4), 1998, pp. 591-607; W. van der Brug & C. van der Eijk, *European elections & domestic politics: lessons from the past and scenarios for the future*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 2007; S. Hix and M. Marsh, 'Punishment or Protest? Understanding European Parliament Elections', *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 69 (2), 2007, pp. 495-510.

<sup>4</sup> Reif and Schmitt, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Note, however, the point made by Gagatsek in this volume: citizens' knowledge about the European Parliament's organisation and functioning of its political groups remains very limited.

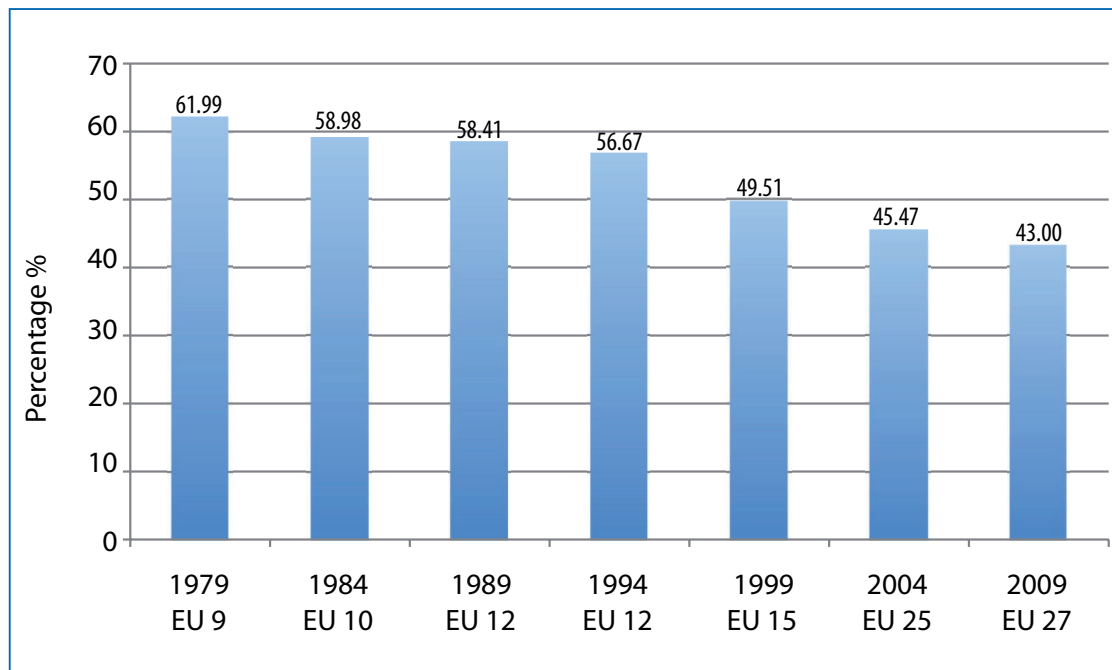
that therefore the second order character of EP elections would rather show a trend towards the first-order rather than a potential third-order character. In other words: now that actors are used to EP elections, now that both voters and parties have witnessed the (at least the indirect) impact of EP elections on politics and ultimately on themselves, there should be signs of a weakening of the second-order character.

In the following, I would like to briefly look at the outcomes of the 2009 EP elections in the light of the – arguably – three central elements of the second-order thesis: low turnout, small parties' success and electoral losses by governing parties.<sup>6</sup> By doing so, I will be able to determine if the initially diagnosed pathologies of EP elections have evolved or stabilised over time.

**1. Low turnout?**

Thirty years after the first holding of European elections, the picture regarding turnout confirms – at first sight – the second order character of EP elections. In all EU 27 countries, turnout in EP elections is structurally lower than in national elections. And this is also the case for the June 2009 elections. Add to this the overall trend: turnout steadily sank from almost 62% in 1979 to a record-low of 43% (Figure 1-1).

**Figure 1-1 Turnout in EP elections 1979-2009**



*Notes:*

1979 - EU9 - 9 Member States: Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, the UK, Denmark and Ireland.

1984 - EU10 - The 9 Member States + Greece in 1981.

1989 - EU12 - The 10 Member States + Spain and Portugal in 1986.

1994 - EU12 - 12 Member States.

1999 - EU15 - The 12 Member States + Austria, Sweden and Finland in 1995.

2004 - EU25 - The 15 Member States + Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus and Malta in 2004.

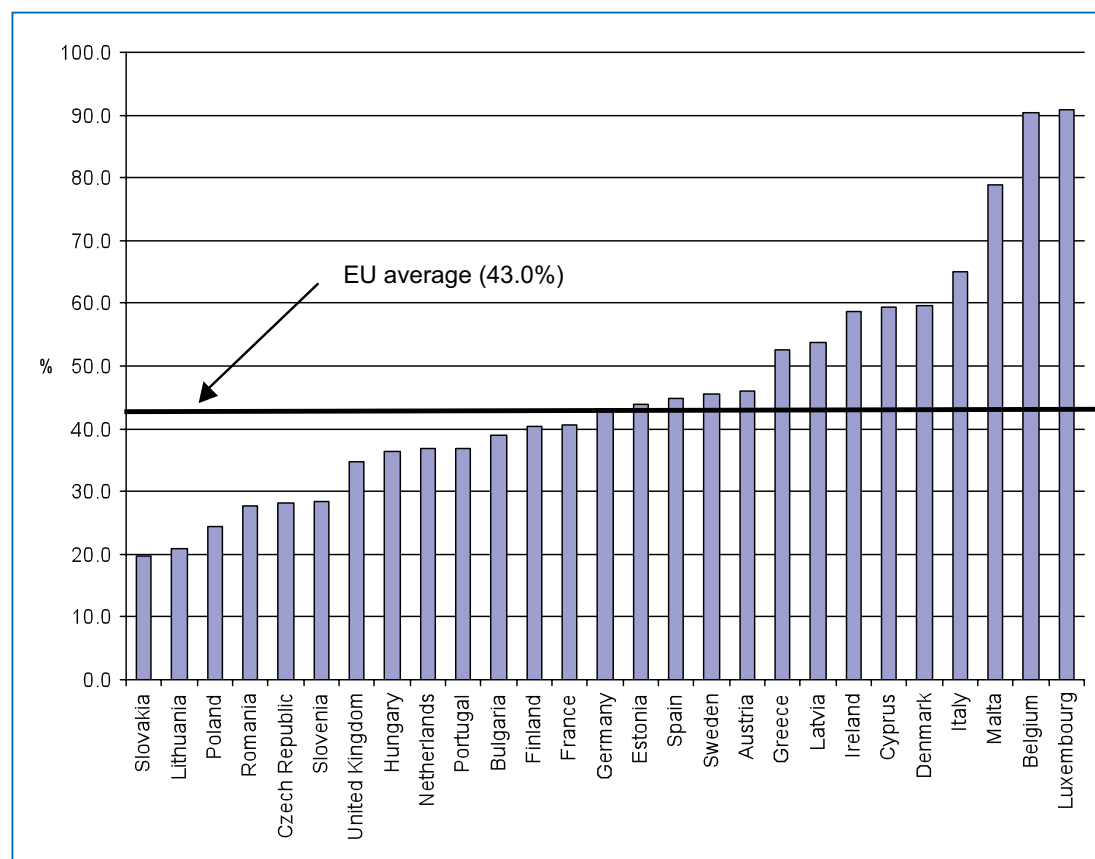
2009 - EU27 - The 25 Member States + Bulgaria and Romania in 2007

Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/turnout\\_en.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/turnout_en.html)

<sup>6</sup> I exclude from this analysis the aspect of 'invalid ballots'.

Of course, the EU grew from nine to 27 member states in the meantime, of which ten – Eastern European countries – have structurally lower turnout rates than West European countries, also in their respective national elections. *Figure 1-2* shows the great variance in turnout between the highest level measured in Luxembourg and Belgium (where voting is mandatory) and Slovakia and Lithuania, where only one out of five voters went to the polls. Generally, the most recent rounds of enlargement account for a large part of the downward trend.

**Figure 1-2 Turnout in the 2009 EP elections by country**



However, East-West differences do not explain the full picture. In particular, between the penultimate EP elections and the June 2009 elections, the average of aggregate turnout in West European member states was reduced by 1.3 percent (*Table 1-1*). On the other hand, in the 10 new member states of Eastern Europe, turnout went up by 1.4 percent. While still important, the turnout gap between East and West is shrinking.

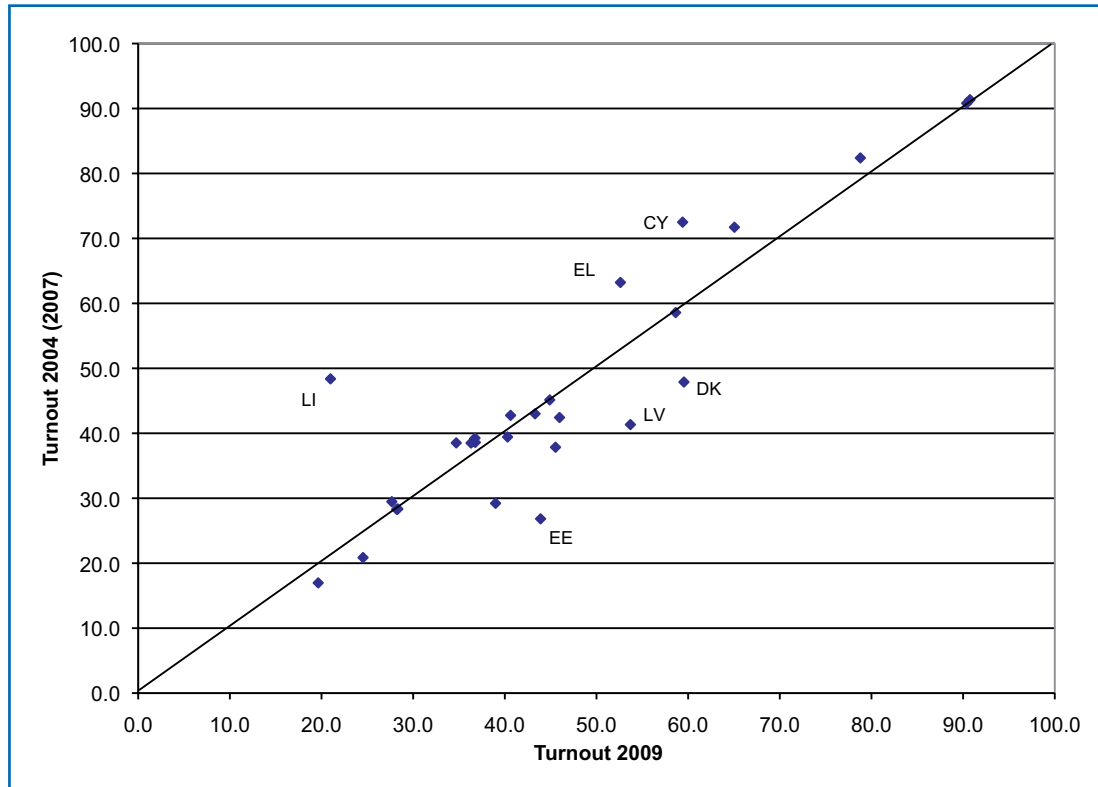
**Table 1-1 Regional differences in turnout (national levels of turnout averaged by region)**

Region	2004(07)	2009	Change in %
West	55.6	54.3	-1.3
East	30.8	32.2	1.4
EU27	45.5	43.1	-2.4

Add to this, the rather large stability between the 2004 and the 2009 elections. Not much changed for most countries – some won a few percent in turnout rates, most lost a few. To be precise: turnout went up in eleven countries, with the rest of the EU27 member states showing a downward trend. Extreme cases of both positive and negative trends can be seen in *Figure 1-3*. Two Baltic states win in both categories. While turnout in Estonia increased by 17 percentage

points,<sup>7</sup> Lithuanian voters have become a rarity. Turnout figures in Lithuania dropped by over 27 percentage points and barely reached the 20 percent mark in 2009. When one dismisses the eight cases in which turnout varied by less than one percent between 2004/07 and 2009, the picture becomes even more balanced: turnout went down more than one percent in eleven countries and went up by more than one percent in eight EU Member states.

**Figure 1-3 Turnout in the most recent two EP elections by country**



Overall, turnout figures decreased in Europe though this trend that is not exclusive to the EP: national elections have been hit by voter apathy and generally political disaffection just as badly if not worse. In this sense, I would argue, EP elections remain second-order events but their second-order character – in terms of turnout – did not get more prominent in 2009. Here and there turnout even increased, though still in a minority of cases.

## **2. Small (and new) political parties gain votes?**

This aspect of the second-order character of EP elections is – at least in this very first attempt to look at the phenomenon – rather confirmed for the EP 2009 elections. There are now 168 national parties represented in the European Parliament, more than six political parties per member state on average. Numerous small and new parties, such as the Swedish Pirate Party, have entered the EP electoral arena successfully. Extreme right-wing and populist parties have, in several countries, made massive gains compared to their national election results (such as in the UK, in Hungary, the Netherlands and in Austria). The same is true for anti-EU parties, which are, at least partially, overlapping with populist right-wing parties.

<sup>7</sup> The European Union Democracy Observatory (EUDO) is currently carrying out a study, on behalf of the Council of Europe, focusing on internet voting in the EP 2009 elections in Estonia. This small Baltic republic was the only EU Member State to offer its citizens the possibility to vote over the internet in the EP elections. Also, it extended its advance polling place voting considerably. A direct link between the large increase in turnout in Estonia and these new possibilities of casting votes are examined in the forthcoming study that will be featured on the EUDO website in early 2010 ([www.eudo.eu](http://www.eudo.eu)).

Most notably the progress of anti-EU parties could be felt, for example, in the UK and in Bulgaria.

When applying the same criteria as Reif and Schmitt to the 2009 EP elections, we find that 41 of the 56 big parties<sup>8</sup> indeed lost in the share of votes. Looking at all other parties for which we have figures from the last national election, the picture is (of course) the inverse: 73% of all small parties won in the EP elections compared to the last national elections.

The overall fragmentation of parties in the EP is somewhat reduced, though, by the political groups that federate the various national parties in the European hemicycle. The four largest groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE and GREENS/EFA) make up 80% of all seats in the European Parliament (see the chapter on the political composition of the new EP by Gagatsek in this volume). And this has always been the case. Post-electoral fragmentation can be curbed through the inclusion of parties into political groups, and the capacity to do so remains very stable over time. The sum of seats held by the four largest political groups in the EP represents about 80% of all seats in incoming European Parliaments since 1979. However, despite the relative stability of post-electoral aggregation into party groups: EP elections remain a fertile ground for small and new political parties. This aspect of the second-order model has hardly changed, with Reif and Schmitt's model remaining largely valid.

### 3. *Governing parties lose?*

According to Reif and Schmitt, not only big parties lose, but also those who govern. At the time of the EP 2009 elections, there were a total number of 60 political parties represented in EU member states' governments. Indeed, 39 (63.9%) of them lost vote shares in the EP 2009 elections, compared to the last respective national elections. Analogous to the table presented by Reif and Schmitt<sup>9</sup> I calculated the total loss of all governing parties by country (*Table 1-2*). In parentheses are the values calculated by Reif and Schmitt for the EP 1979 elections.

*Table 1-2* shows that in 2009, government coalition parties lost in 23 EU member states (that is 85% of all coalitions). This is even worse than in the 1979 EP elections, where Reif and Schmitt report 6 coalitions out of 8 losing (75%). Also, with the only exceptions of Denmark and Italy, the other six governmental coalitions already included in the analysis of the first EP elections did worse in 2009 than thirty years earlier. In a sense, therefore, coalition government parties in Europe lost even more today than in the first elections to the EP. A major element of the second-order hypothesis – government coalition parties lose – is therefore confirmed and even emphasised by the results of 2009. I should add an important qualification to this. Reif and Schmitt also argued that the moment in the electoral cycle could explain the winning or losing of vote share by governmental parties. It is not my intention to go into great detail on this point. A preliminary analysis<sup>10</sup> shows, however, that the distance to the last election has no impact at all on governmental parties' probability to win or to lose in the EP 2009 elections.

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<sup>8</sup> For Reif and Schmitt big parties are those who won more than 15 percent of vote share at the last national elections. In the ParlGov database on which I rely I thereby find 56 big parties. At this point I would like to warmly acknowledge the sharing of the data contained in the ParlGov database, directed by Holger Döring, currently a Max Weber Fellow at the EUI and actively involved in EUDO.

<sup>9</sup> Reif and Schmitt, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> I used the number of days since the last national election as an independent variable, with the loose/win-dummy for all governmental parties constituting the dependent variable and run a binary logistic regression. It goes without saying that such an analysis is impressionistic at best.

**Table 1-2 National Government Parties Lose (Difference in Percent of Votes Cast for Governing Parties: European Elections 2009 and Last Preceding National Elections)**

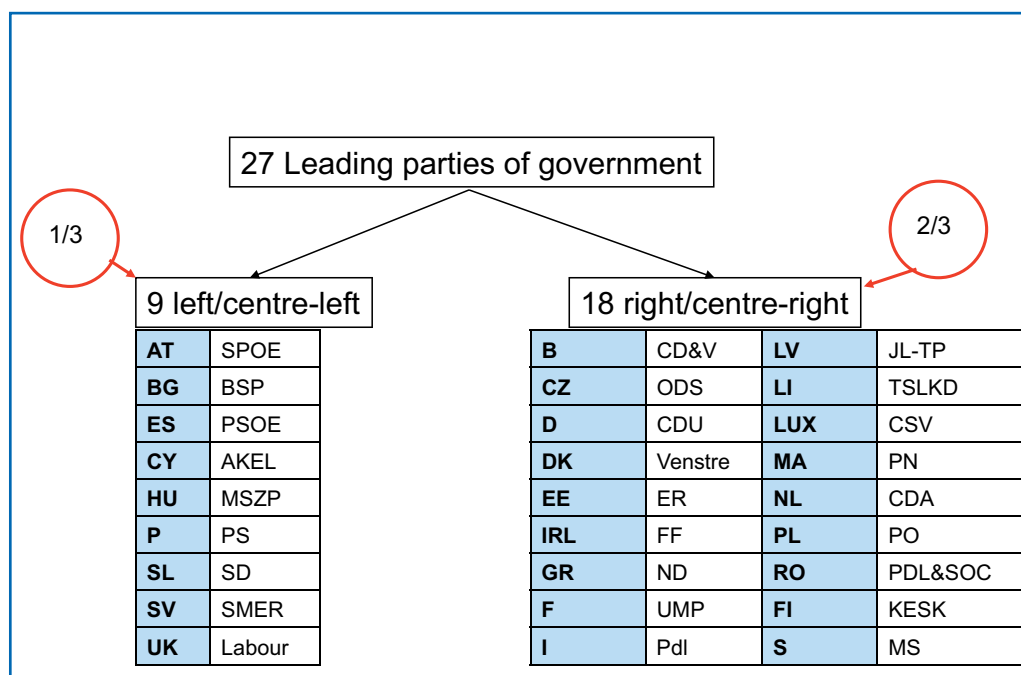
Country	Difference (%)	Reif & Schmitt 1980	Last national elections
Hungary	-25.8		2006
Ireland	-20.3	-16.1	2007
Estonia	-20.1		2007
France	-19.8	-0.3	2007
United Kingdom	-19.5	+4.5	2005
Portugal	-18.5		2005
Latvia	-17.3		2008
Bulgaria	-13.6		2005
Netherlands	-12.8	+2.2	2008
Germany	-10.7	-3.7	2005
Greece	-9.5		2007
Luxembourg	-8.8		2004
Malta	-8.8		2008
Belgium	-8.0	-0.1	2007
Slovenia	-5.8		2008
Sweden	-5.5		2008
Spain	-4.9		2008
Denmark	-3.8	-12.6	2007
Czech Republic	-3.5		2006
Slovakia	-3.1		2008
Romania	-2.7		2008
Cyprus	-1.8		2006
Austria	-1.6		2008
Italy	0.7	-1.8	2008
Poland	1.0		2007
Finland	2.2		2007
Lithuania	7.1		2008

Source: ParlGov Database and Reif and Schmitt 1980, p. 16.

These results are quite clear and we could stop digging any further at this point. However, in the aftermath of the EP elections, which took place at the momentary peak of the economic crisis, attentive observers could not miss the left-right dimension of the election outcome. When looking a bit more closely at the results, in particular of the governing parties, there is an astonishing structure that offers itself to us.

Before showing this structure, let me briefly present the 27 leading parties of government in Europe, at the time of the EP elections. *Figure 1-4* shows that two-thirds (18) of member state governments were led by a right/centre-right party and one third (9) by a left/centre-left party.

Figure 1-4 Leading parties of government in the European Union (June 2009)



Let us now limit our analyses to these 27 leading parties of government, and look at their success in the EP elections in a different way. So far I applied the same logic as Reif and Schmitt, i.e. I calculated the difference between political parties' vote share in the 2009 EP elections and their vote share in the last respective national elections. As we have seen, smaller parties gain disproportionate levels of vote share in EP elections, penalising large parties. As the probability of large parties to govern a country is, however, higher than the probability of small parties to do so, it follows that size of a party, interacting with governmental responsibility, will cause in a large majority of cases governmental parties or governmental coalitions to lose. Indeed, when looking at coalitions, and as we saw, 23 out of 27 coalitions lost compared to the preceding national elections (see above). When we limit ourselves at the leading parties of government, the situation is similar, as 21 of these leading parties of government lost vote shares in the 2009 EP elections.

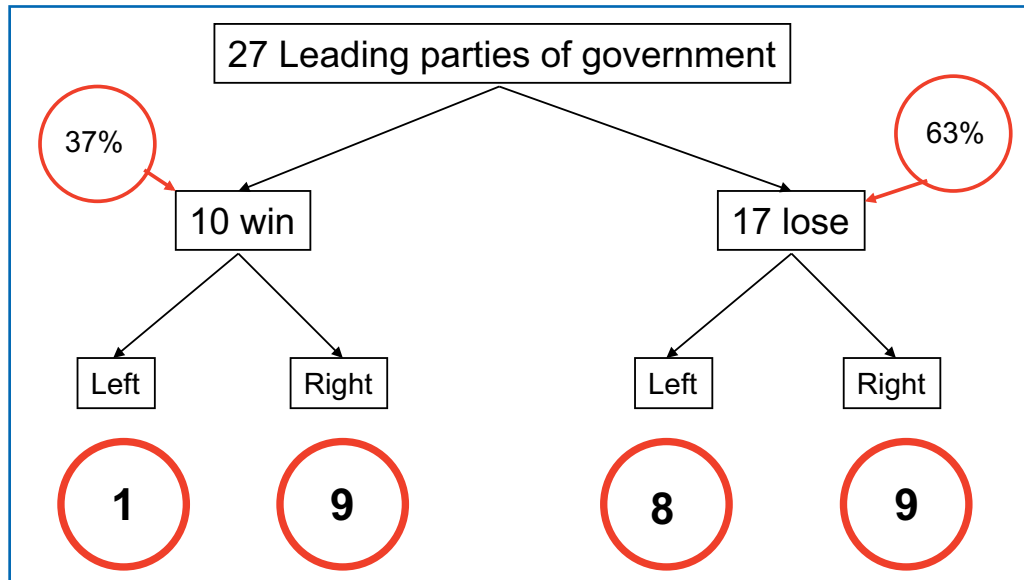
However, I would argue that there is another way of looking at winners and losers of an election. Limiting ourselves to comparing past with present results will tell us something about individual parties or coalitions. But to see whether a party won or lost the elections at stake, one needs to compare the election results of a party with the results of all other competing parties in the same election. A party may well lose vote shares compared to the last national elections, but still largely – win the elections – as their main competitors lost even more heavily. Inversely, a party may gain vote shares in an EP election compared to the last national election but still remain the number two or three electoral force in the country. In cases where small parties find a particularly fertile ground for electoral competition – and this is precisely the case in EP elections – simply looking at 'governmental parties' losing over time' may be missing the point as the latter phenomenon is more probable from the outset.

I therefore suggest looking at the same data in a different light. I do so by parting from the principle that the leading party in government held the number one position in the partisan landscape at the time of the 2009 EP elections. I then look at whether leading parties in government could defend and maintain their number one positions in the EP elections. Instead of looking at absolute gains and losses I therefore rather look at relative political positions before and after the EP elections.

When doing so, we first find confirmation – again – of the majority of the leading parties of government losing these elections. However, the 'government parties lose' phenomenon is

clearly less pronounced. We are now down to 17 out of 27 leading parties of government (63%) that belong to the category of 'losers', i.e. those that lost their previously held number one position in the electoral landscape (Figure 1-5).

Figure 1-5 Gains and losses of leading parties of government in the 2009 EP elections



These 17 'losers' split almost equally between the left/centre left and right/centre right parties. Losers do not politically distinguish themselves, which confirms the political neutrality of governmental parties' losses. However, this is overlooking the winners of the EP elections, i.e. the ten leading parties of government that extended or, at least, maintained their number one position in the national political landscape. Among these ten winners, only one party (the Slovak SMER) is a left/centre left party. All the others are right/centre right parties. Table 1-3 presents this situation most explicitly.

Table 1-3 Winners and losers across the left-right dimension in the EP 2009 elections

L-R	Losers	Winners	N
Left	88.9	11.1	9
Right	50.0	50.0	18
Total	37.0	63.0	27

Eight out of nine (88.9%) of all left/centre-left leading parties of government lost their number one position in the EP elections of 2009. This is very different of right/centre right parties, who overall did much better: their probability of maintaining their number one position among their competitors was 50%. More so, the other half of right/centre right leading parties of government did not always lose their number one position to a competing left-wing party. In Latvia and Finland, both right-wing leading parties in government lost their number one position to another right-wing party. The emerging picture is therefore above all politically tainted: in the 2009 EP elections the right/centre-right in government was more often than not on the winning side. At the same time, the left/centre-left in government lost very badly. With one single exception, all left-wing leading parties of government lost their leading position.

**4. Preliminary conclusions**

This contribution constitutes a very first, preliminary attempt to interpret the results of the EP 2009 elections in the light of the second-order elections' thesis, established 30 years earlier by Reif and Schmitt. All three central elements of this thesis were confirmed in these elections, at least in this APGAR-like test, but with important nuances.



First, the EP 2009 elections were marked by the lowest turnout ever measured. However, as I argue, this is not due to a consistent decline in turnout across all of Europe. In several member states, turnout even went up from the 2004 elections. Furthermore, the gap between East and West in turnout is closing, indicating a possible floor that was reached in terms of electoral participation. In other words, and in my view, the 2009 EP elections did not really become more second-order when looking at turnout figures.

Second, the EP 2009 elections were largely beneficial to small and new political parties. Relatively speaking, large parties lost vote shares to these small and new formations. Reif and Schmitt's thesis is confirmed regarding this element of the model.

Third, parties in government lose. This is indeed the case, but it is not the most important political outcome of the EP 2009 elections. In unison with the second-order hypothesis, governmental parties lose in EP elections. This is true when looking at differences in vote share between the 2009 EP elections and the preceding national elections. Both governmental coalitions and individual leading parties of government overwhelmingly lose in the EP elections. However, and much more importantly: left and centre-left leading parties in government disproportionately lost the EP elections. In 27 member states, only one single left-wing leading party in government could defend its number one position (SMER in Slovakia). This very clear pattern makes the EP elections of 2009 much less second-order than any preceding EP elections. In 2009, left-wing parties lost, across the entire continent. In this sense, the EP elections of 2009 possibly became the first 'real' European elections ever, despite the traditional elements of the second-order hypothesis being confirmed (with nuances). To therefore answer our initial question: yes, the 2009 EP elections confirm the second-order hypothesis by Reif and Schmitt. However, they simultaneously represent the first real European elections in terms of their political outcome. The reason for this 'Europeanization of European elections' arguably lies within the effects of the economic crisis. National elections taking place shortly before and after the EP elections of June 2009 largely confirm the shift to the right in governments across Europe. In a sense, the current economic crisis led to an electoral convergence at both the national and the European levels of party competition.

Note, *tout de même*, that the EP elections remain a series of (at least) 27 electoral competitions and that the converging outcome is not due to a Europe-wide, coordinated mobilization, but rather the result of unconnected – though similar in content – election campaigns. In a sense, and for the first time, the individual electoral puzzle pieces nicely fit together and form a clear picture. However, this picture was not previously designed to look like it does. Rather, it possibly emerges, first and foremost, because of the economic crisis. If we accept this logic, it is rather amusing to note that – again – it needed a severe crisis to make European integration leap forward. This time even in electoral terms.



## 2

## CAMPAIGNING IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Wojciech Gagatek<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginnings of academic research on European Parliament elections, political scientists have devoted large volumes to explaining their second-order nature (see Trechsel in this volume). Particular attention has been paid to investigating the ‘outputs’ of these elections, such as low turnouts, their use as a sanction vote against governing parties, and the relatively good results of small or unknown parties. However, the problem of campaigning has remained virtually untouched. Only more recent scholarship has started to argue that the second-order character of the European Parliament elections also concerns the second-order campaigning of the political parties and the second-order reporting of this event by the mass media.<sup>2</sup> In other words, elections to the European Parliament differ from national ones, among other ways in the intensity of campaigning, which generally speaking is conducted on a much lower scale and with the use of much fewer financial resources. Regardless of the widespread view of these elections as second-order contests, it is nevertheless a very interesting exercise to observe the commonalities and differences in national styles and traditions of campaigning characterizing EU Member States. What factors can be cited to make a case for characterizing the campaigning in EP elections as second-order? How uniform are the campaign patterns? In which areas of campaigning practice do we still observe differences across the member states? Overall, a look into campaign patterns offers a better view of the European Parliament elections because of its ability to explain the general approach of political parties to these elections.

Rather than being a separate analysis, this chapter will serve as an introduction to the 24 country reports depicting the 2009 European Parliament election. It does not aim to look extensively into the various details and specific occurrences (this is undertaken within the country reports), but rather to list the similarities and differences between campaigning in national and EP elections, and also to analyze the pan-European aspect with regard to attempts to coordinate the campaign at the European level. In the first place I will try to list the most common factors responsible for this low-level campaigning. Secondly, I will focus on the 2009 elections, investigating sources of continuity and change with regard to campaigning patterns. Finally, I will analyze the campaign at the European level.

### Factors influencing campaign patterns

Without going deeply into national political contexts, a number of pan-European tendencies can be listed to illustrate the differences between national and European elections, which all together explain the low-profile campaigning in the latter. Some of them are closely related

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in European Politics, University of Warsaw.

<sup>2</sup> See C. H. de Vreese, ‘Second-Rate Election Campaigning? An Analysis of Campaign Styles in European Parliamentary Elections’, *Journal of Political Marketing*, vol. 8 (1), 2009, pp. 7-19; C. H. de Vreese, E. Lauf and J. Peter, ‘The Media and European Parliament Elections: Second-rate Coverage of a Second-order Event?’, in: W. van de Brug, C. van der Eijk (eds.), *European elections & domestic politics: lessons from the past and scenarios for the future*, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, pp. 116-130.

to the reasons explaining the low turnout.<sup>3</sup> The following enumeration does not claim to be exhaustive, but it can certainly provide a useful background to reading the country reports included in this volume.

### **1. Low awareness of the European Parliament**

Various and repeated opinions polls in all the EU Member States confirm a low level of civic awareness regarding both the nature, functioning and role of the European Parliament and of the system under which the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected. For example, according to pre-election Eurobarometer surveys conducted in late 2008, only about 23% of citizens felt well informed about these elections. More than a half of Europeans had never heard or read anything about the EP in any type of mass media, including the Internet. About a half also did not know that MEPs are elected by popular direct ballot.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, these figures must have risen shortly before the election date, but the general conclusion of low-awareness of the EP remains.

A standard argument found in the academic literature links this low awareness to the resulting low turnout. However, it also has a very strong impact on campaigning styles. In a situation where awareness about the functioning of the EP and the nature of the election to this house is so low, national parties have no incentive to structure their main campaign messages around European issues. To offer a slightly simplified example, in national elections, even if certain issues can be very complex and difficult to understand for non-experts (e.g. macro-economic policy), parties can always refer to the everyday problems of the citizens, e.g. relating to the health system, unemployment, etc. In contrast, in the European Parliament elections such a campaigning strategy is difficult to conceive, simply because citizens do not realize the impact of the EU in general, and of the EP in particular, on their daily lives. Therefore, from a practical point of view, it is difficult to identify what the specific tenets of a campaign strategy, the specific selling points which should be targeted at the voters, should be. If only a very limited number of citizens are aware of the real nature and functions of the EP, if the politicians themselves often refrain from engaging in a debate about European issues (see the chapters in this volume), then no wonder that the whole campaign strategy is focused on national problems. Parties choose the terrain that they know best, that is, they repeat national campaign patterns, except for the fact that they do it on a much smaller scale and with fewer resources (see below).

What is especially noticeable is that although most parties develop detailed European programmes, they choose not to focus on them extensively, reverting instead to national issues. As Cater et al. note in this volume with regard to the UK, the issues in the parties' manifestos and campaign literature were not the same as the themes that shaped the campaign. A similar mechanism was most apparent with regard to the German liberal Free Democratic Party, which despite developing an extensive programme for the European elections, ran a personalized campaign focusing on its top candidate in connection with national issues (see Brunsbach et al. in this volume). On the other hand, the 2009 elections proved that sometimes it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between a national and a European issue. For example, climate change, the financial crisis, and some other issues can be treated both as national and European problems, depending on how they are presented by national politicians.

### **2. Unknown candidates**

The whole matter is further complicated by the results of many opinions polls, which show that on average candidates for the European Parliament remain unknown to citizens. The fact that the Parliament is treated as an institution secondary to national parliaments often results in applying the same perspective to the candidates. Given that the whole campaign

<sup>3</sup> For different explanations of a low turnout, see M. Matilla, 'Why bother? Determinants of turnout in the European elections', *Electoral Studies*, vol. 22, 2003, pp. 449-468.

<sup>4</sup> European Parliament Eurobarometer (EB Standard 70) - autumn 2008, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb\\_special\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_en.htm), accessed June 2009.

is focused on national issues, then automatically national leaders come to the forefront. For this reason, parties often treat the European Parliament elections as a sparring match or rehearsal before more important national elections. In the 2009 elections, this was the case in Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal and Greece (see the country reports in this volume). For example, the Romanian parties used the election campaign for the European Parliament to advertise the Romanian presidential candidates for the election set for December 2009 (see Todor in this volume). In this situation, the European Parliament candidates remain largely in the background. The only exception is when well-known national politicians run for the European Parliament. To simplify a little, often this can be explained by politicians wanting to rebuild their positions in the EP and then return to national politics, or wanting to spend their political 'pension' there. In some cases they also do it to increase their parties' vote share, and then give up the mandate to the next on the list. This was especially visible during the 2009 election in Italy, in which the leaders of almost all the major parties, including the Prime Minister Berlusconi himself, ran for the European Parliament as top candidates in each of the five Italian constituencies, only in order to further legitimize their position in national politics, without really intending to take up a seat in the European Parliament (see Bressanelli et al. in this volume). The effect then is that not only the candidates are unknown, but even the elected members of the house.

Finally we come to questions related to the design of the electoral system. An important issue is whether MEPs are elected from one single national list, or whether the country is divided into a number of regional constituencies. A large majority of the Member States (21 out of 27 to be precise) have adopted the single list system, in which the whole country forms an electoral constituency, and every citizen, regardless of place of residence, chooses among the same names.<sup>5</sup> Such a system influences the campaign style, with regional campaigning limited to echoing national campaign patterns, rather than focusing on regional-level problems.

### **3. Concurrent elections**

In 7 Member States the 2009 European Parliamentary elections took place together with national, regional or local elections. For example, this happened in Luxembourg (which traditionally holds European and national elections on the same day), Belgium (holding regional elections) and Latvia (local elections). The case of Bulgaria in 2009 nicely illustrates the dilemma over whether to hold national and European elections together (see Lyubenov in this volume) when the date of the national election is to be set within a relatively short time distance from the European one. The Bulgarian opposition argued for holding the European and national elections on the same day in order to increase turnout, whereas the governing parties preferred to have the elections separately so as to make sure that in the former there would be space to discuss EU affairs. The second option prevailed. However, since the distance between the national and European elections was only one month, the EP elections ended up being characterized both by a low turnout and a focus on national, rather than European, issues. Overall, much as concurrent elections generally are likely to increase the turnout, the side-effect is that in these circumstances national parties focus even more on national rather than European issues. Overall, the whole campaign strategy focuses on the national elections, with the European contest remaining in the background.

### **4. Few resources spent on the campaign**

As the chapters in this volume illustrate, on average the funds appropriated by parties to the EP campaign usually vary between 10 to 30% of those spent on national elections, despite the

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<sup>5</sup> A difficult case concerns Germany, where CDU/CSU submits lists at the regional level (Länder) but the other parties (SPD, Greens, FDP and Die Linke) propose single national lists. For a thorough and up-to-date analysis of legislation regarding all aspects of the EU elections, including regulations concerning election campaign, see W. Lehmann, *The European Elections: EU Legislation, National Provisions and Civic Participation*, European Parliament, Brussels, 2009, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/eplive/expert/multimedia/20090303MLT50670/media\\_20090303MLT50670.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/eplive/expert/multimedia/20090303MLT50670/media_20090303MLT50670.pdf), accessed October 2009.

fact that in some countries the overall amount of campaign expenditure in the 2009 EP election doubled (e.g. Sweden, Poland). Nonetheless, the relatively low amount of overall expenditure on EP elections both confirms that parties treat these elections as second-order contests and also explains the low intensity of campaigning. Certainly, besides the level of spending, it is also important to consider how parties spend their funds, but nevertheless these low figures speak volumes about what we can expect with regard to the intensity of EP election campaigns.

It is important to notice that in many Member States, low spending limits are set already by law. For example, in Poland parties and electoral committees can in practice spend a maximum of a third of what they spend in the national elections (see Gagatek et al. in this volume). In other words, legal rules can limit the possibility of organizing a high-profile campaign. However, we need to bear in mind that the rules on campaign spending have been passed by the parties themselves while acting in national parliaments. In all cases then, either by the letter of law or out of practical considerations, the parties themselves recognize that the EP elections are a second-order contest, and hence limit the amount of resources which they allocate to the campaign.

### **5. Lack of visible pan-European political parties**

Many commentators observe that if these elections were really to be called 'European', one of the conditions would be that the campaign for the European Parliament should actually be coordinated by European political parties, rather than the national ones. Such European political parties, understood as federations of national political parties, have been present at the EU level for the last 30 years. There are currently ten Europarties, most of them based on the ideological commitments of certain party families in Europe and usually corresponding closely to their respective group in the European Parliament. Among the largest and most well known Europarties are the European People's Party (EPP), uniting Christian democratic, centrist and like-minded parties; the Party of European Socialists (PES), gathering socialist, social democratic, labour and democratic progressive forces; the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) and the European Green Party (EGP). Their principal role has always been focused on coordinating the activities of their national member parties at the EU level, for example by trying to develop common programmes, and enabling exchanges of views between heads of state and governments representing the same political family. For a few years they have even been directly financed by the EU. Despite this, their campaigning role has only recently started to emerge but is still practically speaking invisible. Awareness of their existence is minimal, and their resources are too limited to change this situation. The simplest explanation is that the national parties (who are members of their EU-level counterparts) are not in fact interested in coordinating their campaigns at the European level. For example, although most of these European political parties adopt a manifesto for the elections (agreed on by all of their national member parties), these manifestos are rarely used as the instruments of the national electoral campaigns. On the other hand, the logic of second-order elections understood as national contests, together with the variety of different national political contexts, makes it difficult to develop a viable pan-European campaign strategy. From this point of view, the EP elections are often presented as a number of national electoral contests with a European result, that is, affecting the political composition of the European Parliament.

### **6. Lack of purpose**

Finally, the whole topic of EP elections is further complicated when we analyze their purpose. To offer a rather simplified explanation, the primary result of a national election either leads to the reconfirmation of the incumbent government or the nomination of a new one. In EP elections, on the other hand, no government at EU level is either reconfirmed or overthrown. The composition of the European Commission, and more specifically the nomination of Commissioners by national governments, depends in practice solely on the result of national rather than European elections. Even if a governing party (or parties) loses the EP elections, it still has the right to nominate the candidate for European Commissioner of its choice.

The only slight exception to this rule concerns the nomination for the president of the European Commission, who, according to the Treaty of Lisbon, should be nominated with a view to the result of the EP elections. In practice, this means that the candidate for Commission presidency should be affiliated to the largest political group in the European Parliament, which in fact had already happened informally even before the Treaty of Lisbon came into force on 1 December 2009, namely on the occasion of the first nomination of José Manuel Barroso in 2004.

Overall, compared to national elections, in the European Parliament elections there is much less at stake. From the point of view of campaign goals, the key point is to notice that the voters do not recognize the connection between the election result and the nomination for the presidency of the European Commission, or any other posts, as it is too distant and too vague. The overall effect is then that EP elections are often presented as having no discernible purpose. Certainly, there are many other factors to consider, but overall the above-mentioned tendencies have profound consequences on the way campaigning is conducted in all the EU Member States.

### **Convergence and differences in national campaign styles**

Scholarship that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s offered a new view of the political party. Contrary to previous models of the traditional mass party, where a large active membership played an important role, the new models, such as electoral-professional or cartel parties,<sup>6</sup> diminish the role of the members and instead highlight the role of professional campaigners. From the point of view of this analysis it is important to notice that parties no longer rely on members in their campaigns, but instead revert to external help and the advice of professional campaigners, who organize centralized media-focused campaigns, often based on sophisticated research aiming at targeting the voters.<sup>7</sup> Political marketing, defined as the application of business-like marketing principles to political campaigns, is therefore commonly employed by all parties, regardless of whether we are speaking about national or European Parliament campaigns. As explained above, the difference only lies in the level of resources attributed to political marketing, national campaigns being highly financed and European campaigns under-financed and low-profile.

From this point of view, it is important to notice that the professionalization of political campaigns in Europe has been largely influenced by American campaigning. The 2009 election also saw such an impact. Not only did many candidates shout Obama's now proverbial 'Yes We Can' slogan, or focus on the word 'change' (the key slogan used in Obama's campaign), but many of them also tried to copy web-based fund-raising techniques, modelled on the American example. Obviously this influence also concerns the use of Internet campaigning. Although the power of the Internet has always been highly regarded, the example of the 2008 US Presidential elections showed how important the use and development of Internet-based social networks can be. The 2009 elections in most countries showed that key questions for the candidates were: who has more 'fans' on Facebook, or who is more active on Twitter. What is especially important is that the mass media were very eager to report on the use of these new techniques by the candidates. Furthermore, the 2009 EP election saw the development of various web-based voting aid applications, with EU Profiler being offered in all Member States in all EU languages (see Breuer in this volume). However, from a general perspective, an Internet campaign is just one of several channels through which the parties try to reach voters. As the chapters in this volume confirm, the Internet is perceived as an excellent tool for reaching young voters, although traditional means, such as TV, posters and door-to-door canvassing, are the major forms of political communication. However, apart from the potentially large

<sup>6</sup> See A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York, 1988; R. Katz and P. Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, vol. 1 (1), 1995, pp. 5-28.

<sup>7</sup> See D. M. Farrell and P. Webb, *Political Parties as Campaign Organizations* in R. J. Dalton and M. P. Wattenberg (eds.), *Parties without partisan: political change in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 129-153.

range of users, the Internet also has one very important advantage over the traditional means of political communication: it is relatively cheap. Even if it is designed by the best webmasters and developed by the best political marketing experts, the costs of launching a social network or an interesting website cannot be compared to the costs of buying even a short TV advertisement in prime-time, let alone running a whole campaign based on TV ads.

Despite the tendency towards uniformity of some campaign practices, there are still important differences between the Member States in their visions of what an election campaign should be all about. The 2009 Elections for the European Parliament (like the previous ones) confirmed that not only the degree of campaign professionalization varies cross-nationally,<sup>8</sup> but also that the electoral and political cultures of Member States largely influence how political campaigns are organized. Using the already-mentioned example of TV advertising, in Denmark and Ireland paid TV ads are prohibited, whereas in Poland they have become the main organizing feature of election campaigning. In Luxembourg, one month before the election date it is forbidden to publish opinion polls, whereas such restrictions are unknown in other countries. As such, the first differences between Member States originate from different legal provisions. Differences can also be attributed to political culture. The UK and Ireland are particularly known for putting a high premium on direct personalized campaigns, often based on door-to-door canvassing, whereas such forms are less emphasized in Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, some differences also stem from the different calculations of specific political parties, even in the same Member State. This was the case in the 2009 Spanish European Parliamentary campaign (see Casal Bértoa et al. in this volume). The two major Spanish parties, the People's Party (PP) and the Spanish United Workers' Party (PSOE) decided to launch campaigns with different priorities. The former organized a more traditional campaign, focusing on personal contacts and meetings, whereas the latter gave priority to new means of communication. Overall, the facts that there are certain tendencies towards uniformity and that the EP election campaign is generally low-profile do not mean that campaign styles completely converge across the Member States.

### **Campaign at the European level**

As explained above, the lack of strong active pan-European political parties is one of the major reasons why these elections are not in fact really 'European', but rather 'national' contests with a European result. However, one of the most important novelties of this election, at least when seen from the Brussels perspective, was the increasing presence and direct competition between political parties at the European level.<sup>9</sup> Only recently have major European political parties, and especially the Party of the European Socialists (PES), started to argue that the political choices made at the European level are the same as the national ones, that the choice between the European centre-left or the European centre-right is as important as it is in the national context. A burst of PES activity was especially noticeable with regard to the nomination for the post of President of the European Commission. Already on the occasion of the 2004 elections, the largest European political party, the European People's Party (EPP), had demanded that in proposing candidates for the above post, national governments should choose a candidate from a political family winning the EP elections. This was seen as an attempt to give the EP elections a discernible purpose. The struggle over the Commission presidency was also repeated on the occasion of the 2009 election. Whereas the EPP managed to unite and support José Manuel Barroso for the next term, the PES was too internally divided to come up with a name against this candidacy. Furthermore, all the European political parties, with different degrees of success however, tried to convince their national member parties to coordinate their campaigns at a greater level across Europe. Many national parties used their membership of one of the respected European political parties to further legitimize their status in national politics. Sometimes the leaders of sister parties visited their colleagues to help in campaigning (see the chapters in this volume). However, the main problem with regard to the campaign at the EU level concerned

<sup>8</sup> de Vreese 2009, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> See W. Gagatsek, 'The European People's Party and the Party of European Socialists: Government and Opposition?', *European View*, vol. 8 (2), 2009, pp. 301-11.



the indisputable fact that although the European political parties are increasing their efforts to have a united, even moderately coordinated, pan-European campaign, the citizens remain totally unaware of it, and the reports in this volume note either little room or no role at all for transnational party connections.

A particular example of the difficulties in organizing such a pan-European campaign is the case of Libertas Europe.<sup>10</sup> After organizing a very successful national campaign against the Treaty of Lisbon in Ireland, Declan Ganley, an Irish multimillionaire, came up with the idea of repeating his success at the European level. His idea was to recruit common candidates from all the Member States to run in the European Parliament elections under the banner of Libertas. Although initially his plans raised enormous excitement and a sense of threat in Brussels circles, the effects of this campaign effort were dismal. Libertas managed to register lists of candidates in only 12 Member States, and only one candidate running under the Libertas banner was elected (Philippe de Villiers in France). Apart from a number of controversies regarding both Ganley himself and the candidates that he recruited all over Europe, the Libertas strategy of basing its campaign on opposition to the Treaty of Lisbon proved to be inefficient, partly because it could not fit with the second-order, national-problems-driven campaign. According to various opinion polls, including those conducted by Eurobarometer, citizens did not want to hear again about the institutional intricacies of EU integration, but rather about real problems that affect them, such as the financial and economic crisis or climate change. However, even though it may have been an appropriate campaign strategy, it proved to be very difficult to reach citizens by launching a pan-European campaign focused on European issues in elections fought within the national logics.

### Conclusions

The general conclusions of the chapters in this volume confirm the campaign trends observed in previous EP elections, the general characteristics of which have been depicted above. The 2009 elections are therefore no exception here – second-order campaigning still prevails. Both with regard to the differences between the Member States and between the individual parties in any single Member State, the campaign strategies can be studied and presented as a number of choices, where parties and politicians had to find a golden mean between different options: between direct and media-based campaigning, between positive and negative campaign styles, between rebranding and establishing new parties, between focusing on leaders and establishing name recognition of the candidates, and finally, between focusing on EU issues and those typical of national politics. In making these choices, in the European Parliament elections political parties are however limited by a number of factors, as described in this chapter.

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<sup>10</sup> For a thorough analysis, see W. Gagatek, *European Political Parties as Campaign Organizations. Towards a greater politicisation of the European Parliament elections*, Centre for European Studies, Brussels, 2010, ch. 3.



## 3

**THE BIGGEST MARKETING CAMPAIGN IN THE HISTORY OF THE EU***Lutz Meyer*<sup>1</sup>

In the past, Europe tried to convince its citizens with a rather poor argument: Vote in the European Elections because it's good for Europe. Regrettably, many political parties still argue using this rationale. But would you buy a computer just because it is good for the manufacturer? Surely not, and the same holds true for our political behaviour. If you want to activate people, you have to tell them why a topic is important. It's all about personal relevance! A high voter turnout requires clear alternatives to choose from. And a loud statement about what is at stake for me as an individual.

Scholz & Friends was chosen by the European Parliament to create public awareness of the significance of the election and the Parliament itself in the run-up to the 2009 European Elections – in all of the 27 member states. The result was the largest marketing campaign in the history of the EU to date.

All activities centred on a simple idea: whether you like it or not, Europe is very relevant to your daily life. Where should our food come from? How should we respond to the financial crisis? How open should Europe's borders be, and should we be spending more money on agriculture or on research and education? All these questions are answered at the European level, with the European Parliament playing a major role. By using your vote, you decide on the most important issues of your own personal future.

Was the campaign successful? One may say so for two reasons. First, the public noticed the 2009 European Parliament elections much earlier and on a much larger scale than in the past. The media covered many elements of the campaign, explaining the competencies of the European Parliament. It is reasonable to assume that citizens' interest was aroused, amidst all of the national issues the parties discussed in their partisan European Elections campaigns. Second, 2009 saw the first significant slowing of the previously rapid decline in participation; in some countries there was even an increase in the turnout.

But above all, the campaign demonstrated that it is possible to broadly communicate even complex political themes. In this respect many observers saw the European Parliament's campaign for the 2009 European Elections as a milestone in the marketing of Europe's political institutions. And it may also have been a model for future ways of putting across the work of the Parliament, Commission and Council of the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Lutz Meyer (41) is a Partner of the Scholz & Friends Group, the leading European Agency Network for orchestrated communication. He created and headed the campaign for the European Parliament in all 27 EU countries. Meyer has studied political sciences and international law. He was visiting professor for political sciences and European integration, worked in several election campaigns and is now managing director of Scholz & Friends offices in Berlin and Brussels. The agency Scholz & Friends is present in all European capitals and more countries. [www.s-f.com/europeanagenda](http://www.s-f.com/europeanagenda). For comments: [lutz.meyer@s-f.com](mailto:lutz.meyer@s-f.com)

### **The new strategy in EU marketing: Do it for yourself, not for Europe**

As consumers, we are all used to taking decisions every day. Do we want this or that, and do we really want to spend money on it? These decisions are based on the individual image of the objects at stake, but even more importantly on their usefulness. Brand communication is mainly about consumer benefit. Brands and their products follow a coherent story, at the end of which is a chocolate bar on a supermarket shelf or a car in a showroom. How the goods got there, and what happened to them on their way, is of interest only to a tiny minority of consumers.

The consumer and the citizen (they are one and the same) want a cohesive image of the product. The more uniform a brand's appearance, the easier it is to establish a positive image. And similarly, citizens want to know what significance a certain policy has for their lives. This might explain why European politics have a rather poor reputation. While there is a somewhat increased acceptance of Europe in the wake of the financial crisis, the reputation of the Commission and Parliament has been in decline for years.

This effect cannot be merely ascribed to the work of the institutions. After all, hardly anyone understands what is actually going on inside. And, viewed objectively, the work of the Commission and Parliament, in terms of the tasks they face and the results they achieve, is actually rather efficient and successful. The negative image of "organised Europe" is much more the result of the way the media put its work across.

The media convey the political agenda. They report what is newsworthy: events, people, figures, pictures, conflicts, and themes that affect people in their everyday lives or that are relevant for some other reason. The more of these criteria apply, the more something is reported on.

The essence of the EU, and the secret of its success so far, is that decisions are reached by 27 Member States. But because the media are mostly interested in conflict and people, Brussels has come to serve national governments as a stage on which to assert their own interests over and against the interests of everybody else. No wonder then that the citizens perceive the EU as a place of discord. And because there are endless numbers of national politicians who need to portray themselves in their national media as winners at every turn of the road, the EU becomes the loser again and again.

The European Elections are a manifestation of this process: Electoral participation is in constant decline, even though the Parliament has been gaining more and more authority for years. Eighty per cent of the rules that shape our everyday lives originate in Brussels or Strasbourg, and the Parliament makes decisions that fundamentally affect the key issues of our daily existence.

### **Billboards: Because democracy always begins on the streets**

To speak to Europeans right in the midst of their daily lives – that was the aim of the European Elections campaign. And where could that be achieved more effectively than while waiting at the bus stop or strolling through a pedestrian zone? And by what means can you reach people best? With topics that directly affect their lives: food, energy, education, security. The ten images depicted on the campaign's billboards made European Union citizens aware of the decisions they are faced with. They conveyed concise, provocative issues from various political areas which fall under the auspices of the European Parliament. Would you prefer organically grown apples, apples from conventional agriculture, or genetically modified fruit? This is a question that should not just be asked at the supermarket, but also at the elections. After all, whether it's education, security, or the production of food, the 375 million voters can influence the trajectory of the European Parliament's decisions on numerous front lines.

Of course, not every subject is of equal importance to every EU member state. Equal opportunities are not debated with the same vigour everywhere, nor are consumer rights. That is why the whole campaign was designed to be flexible. Each country could choose the posters that best suited its political landscape.



Billboard from the communication campaign of the European Parliament: It's your choice!

© European Parliament

Source: [http://www.flickr.com/photos/european\\_parliament/3385587986/sizes/m/in/photostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/3385587986/sizes/m/in/photostream/)

### 3-D-installations: Gaining media attention with a chicken

In order to create strong media images, Scholz & Friends put four of the ten campaign images into the public arena in the shape of giant, three-dimensional installations. A total of 60 exhibits of this type simultaneously toured all the European Union's member states. They stopped in 88 European towns and cities, giving the campaign a highly visible profile.

Just as with the posters, each country could choose the images which best suited its national political situation. Berliners, for instance, marvelled at an installation on the subject of migration, which involved a castle wall and a hedge, while the people of Madrid were confronted by giant hens representing the topic "consumer rights".



3D-installation in the centre of Sofia, Bulgaria: How much labelling do we need?

© European Parliament

Source: [http://www.flickr.com/photos/european\\_parliament/3420731669/sizes/o/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/3420731669/sizes/o/)

The sculptures were very popular with photographers: not only did tourists and other amateur photographers gather around the installations; the media illustrated their reports on the European Elections with chickens, hedges, warning triangles, and power switches.

### Interactive multimedia studios: Tune into Europe

Around 1,600 Europeans made use of the opportunity to record their own personal statements on the most pressing issues of European politics in what came to be known as the Choice Box. Not only campaign themes such as security, energy, and equal opportunities were up for discussion; in the interactive multimedia studio, people were allowed to say whatever they thought was important about the EU. The videos were broadcast on location, on the YouTube

website, and on two giant screens in Brussels. This initiated a political dialogue that went beyond all borders. Furthermore, members of the European Parliament were able to get an impression of the topics that occupy the minds of the people they represent in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Scholz & Friends designed the Choice Box especially for the European Elections campaign. A total of 35 boxes toured through 66 European towns and cities prior to the election. The Choice Box created a completely new means by which citizens could communicate with the European Parliament.

### **TV and radio spots: Massive free airtime throughout Europe**

The television and the radio ads both followed the same basic idea: whoever is casting a vote today is not just voting – he or she is shaping the news of the future. Citizens across the EU saw and heard fictitious – and sometimes very provocative – news in the ads. For example, a little Spanish girl in a television studio announced that driving cars was forbidden on weekdays. A young man informed viewers that Europe had decided to turn to nuclear power in order to halt climate change. And a Czech worker announced that the EU had closed its borders to imports with the aim of safeguarding jobs. The ads ended with the slogan: it is you who decides what tomorrow's news will be.

The TV spot was produced in 34 different languages – the 23 official languages of the member states and also regional languages such as Catalan. The radio ad was broadcast in 29 different languages.

Scholz & Friends designed the television ad to be flexible, so that it could be adapted to the political circumstances of the various member states. It was filmed in several parts that could then be combined with one another. The result was that the ad hit the political nerve of each country. 114 television channels broadcast the television spot free of charge.

### **Viral videos: Spreading the message on the web**

A mad axe murderer, bank robbers on the run, racing cyclists – in three viral videos, which Scholz & Friends produced for the election campaign, all of them were able to spare a few minutes to cast their votes. What the videos communicated was that “don't have the time” is no excuse for anyone. They were posted on YouTube and MySpace and spread quickly all over the Internet.

Within three weeks, the short films had clocked up 300,000 hits on YouTube. In France the horror video with the mad axe murderer reached number one in the Politics section of the YouTube Charts.

The virals were not only well received on the Internet. The Spanish television channel TVE 1 showed the horror video on its main news programme. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* also reported on the videos, as did the Dutch *Handelsblad*. Germany's Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel must have been one of the video's most famous fans: she posted the racing cyclist clip on her Facebook profile.

### **Web profiles and applications: Building up a new community**

Around 55,000 community members linked themselves to the Parliament on its MySpace and Facebook profiles. Additionally, by using conventional advertising methods such as web banners, the European Election's online campaign made good use of interactivity. The MySpace website offered users a range of Web 2.0 applications. Links joining the European Parliament's MySpace page with the YouTube video platform and the Flickr photo gallery completed the Parliament's debut on the social media scene.

Another element of the online campaign was a virtual tour which presented the European Parliament's website to Internet users. A Navigator guided the curious from web banners to the most relevant information on the European Elections – from background knowledge about the institutions, all the way to ten good reasons why you should make use of your right to vote.

### **Country specific measures: 27 national campaigns**

Although most citizens are favourably inclined towards a unified Europe, the majority are not very interested in the European Parliament's elections themselves. Hardly anyone looks weeks or even months ahead to find out when they will have the opportunity to cast their ballots. Only a few look for that kind of information actively, which is why the campaign had to lend a helping hand. It went to the places where regular people go – British rugby stadiums, for instance. The 24-metre signage around the field, in place for 13 matches, reached an audience totalling a million viewers.

The orchestrated overall campaign gave a shape and a direction to the manifold activities throughout Europe. Furthermore, in order to reach even more people in the various member states, there were another 87 special projects specific to particular countries. They ranged from discussion events, to press seminars and student parties, to a road show in which a branded truck carried information materials around Spain. There were a total of 128 road show stops and events all over Europe.

### **Branding Brussels Airport: Early awareness amongst the EU multiplier**

18.5 million passengers embark, disembark, and transfer at Brussels Airport every year. Almost 12 million of them are citizens of the EU. The airport is a major European transport hub, and also the best place in Brussels to reach out to multipliers throughout all of Europe. That is why Scholz & Friends branded the interior of the European Terminal with large-scale images from the election campaign.

Giant gates confronted travellers with a choice: “How open should our borders be?” By choosing the left-hand entrance you supported the “European Fortress”, and by going through the right-hand gate you indicated your advocacy of open frontiers.

In addition to the subject of migration, the gates and ceiling hangers posed questions to passengers on the subjects of financial market regulation, standardisation, food production, consumer protection, security, and power generation.

### **Wide media coverage without a media budget**

You can buy attention with money – or you can generate it with powerful ideas. When there is no big budget available for a campaign, you have to get creative. Strong ideas equal more efficient communication. The installations used in the European Elections campaign were one such strong idea. In many countries they became the media image for reports on the European Elections, and they adorned numerous front pages. The big German national daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, for instance, showed one of the chickens on its front-page and asked, “Breast or leg?”

Conventional media such as newspapers, television and radio, modern online communication channels such as blogs – they all picked up on the campaign willingly. The elements were used across all media: modified poster images were disseminated on blogs, and the viral with the mad axe murderer made the evening news on the Spanish television station TVE 1. The *Financial Times* ran the title “Parliament's online quest for excitement”, with the sub-title “the cool new kid on MySpace”, referring to the European Parliament's profile on the social media platform.

The European Elections campaign had to reach out to 375 million European voters, and had only five cents per head to do so. It therefore relied mainly on unconventional PR instruments instead of expensive advertising, and offered contents that the media could use and disseminate for free. The strategy certainly paid off.





## 4

## THE EU PROFILER: A NEW WAY FOR VOTERS TO MEET PARTIES AND TO UNDERSTAND EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

*Fabian Breuer*<sup>1</sup>

This eBook emerged to a large extent from the work conducted for the EU Profiler, the first Europe-wide voting advice application (VAA), which was set-up for the European Parliament elections. Many of the contributors of this eBook were actively engaged in the pioneering work of the EU Profiler. This chapter will briefly introduce this project and link it to the eBook.

### Background

The EU Profiler tool and research project is the work of a consortium of institutions in Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland, and was online for voters from the end of April 2009. Currently the huge amount of data that was generated by coding the parties and by the users filling in the questionnaire is being analysed by the research team. The project is led by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), part of the European University Institute (EUI) and was developed under the auspices of the EUI-based European Union Democracy Observatory (EU DO).<sup>2</sup> When the EU Profiler tool was online from 23 April until the elections it attracted more than 2.5 million users.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, the EU Profiler and its follow-up work have two aims: first of all, during the election campaign and before the elections took place, it was a means for voters to gain an unobstructed view of the European political landscape and their place within it. Voters, who wanted to gain an overview of the parties' positions on a number of salient political issues, could inform themselves by positioning themselves on 30 statements of a simple questionnaire. This allowed them to compare their stances to those of the parties and to grasp not only the offer of their national, but also the European, parties. With easy-to-understand analyses and visualisations, the user had the opportunity to gain knowledge about what was at stake in the elections and which parties were closest to his or her preferences. Users who wanted to 'dig deeper', could go beyond a mere comparison of their preferences and the parties' positions and could follow the parties' positions in detail: given that all party positions were documented, the user could browse through the relevant documentation (party programmes and websites, press statements, etc.) and gain detailed information on the parties' positions. In sum, the tool offered the voters various possibilities for engaging with the parties, their offer regarding the elections, and the elections in general. It has to be noted that the tool gained huge attention in the European media, among voters, in blogs and the like, and that it gained high visibility during the election campaign.

<sup>1</sup> Fabian Breuer, Project Assistant of EU DO and EU-Profiler coordinator.

<sup>2</sup> The EU Profiler consortium consists of the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, the Amsterdam-based company Kieskompas and the NCCR Democracy (University of Zurich/Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau)/Politools network. Professor Alexander H. Trechsel of the EUI is the project leader and more than 120 academic collaborators from across Europe contributed to the project. The overall development is overseen by a Steering Committee, which consists of representatives from the developing institutions and other Political Science Professors.

<sup>3</sup> The tool can still be accessed at [www.euprofiler.eu](http://www.euprofiler.eu). For the research conducted, however, only data obtained before the elections is taken into consideration.

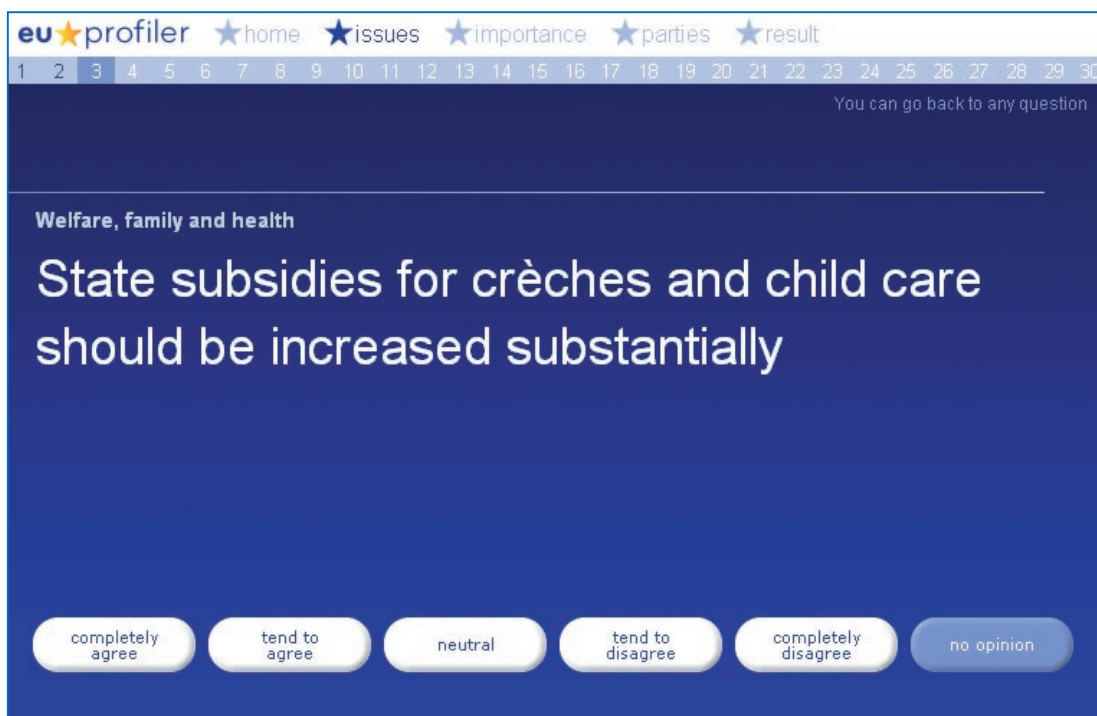
It goes without saying that such a tool and such attention have the potential to increase voters’ understanding of what parties stand for and how the political landscape lies. In this sense, VAAs like the EU Profiler can increase voters’ comprehension of, and interest in, elections. Many political scientists even assume that such an offer increases the likelihood of voters taking part in elections. The question of whether tools like the EU Profiler can increase the turnout in elections is one of the main research questions the EU Profiler academic team is currently working on. Whatever the answer to this highly relevant question might be, it is clear that the EU Profiler is an innovative tool that applies modern ICT to political analysis, bringing voters closer to the offers of political parties and increasing their interest in elections. This is an effort which fits into the development of modern democracies and the current debate on e-democracy, e-participation and e-voting.

Apart from the aim to offer a tool that allows voters to inform themselves about the elections and the European political landscape, the EU Profiler team had an academic interest in gaining research data related to the European elections. First of all, with the coding of almost 300 European parties, the team obtained an immense database on the positions of European parties on current political issues. Furthermore, the opinions of the users complemented the dataset in a way that has not been seen before. Overall, the EU Profiler provided academics with a huge amount of innovative data for conducting research on the European electorate and the European political landscape. For details on the academic interest and the data used, see the section “Data Use and Research”.

**The tool**

For the voters, using the Profiler was quite straightforward: based on their responses to the questionnaire, the tool presented the user with his/her ‘political profile’. Users were invited to offer their reaction to a series of 30 statements with one of five responses, ranging from ‘Completely agree’ to ‘Completely disagree’. They could also offer ‘no opinion’.

**Figure 4-1 An example of an EU Profiler statement – Welfare, family and health**



At the same time, the EU Profiler kept a record of the positions of the political parties on the same 30 issues. The user’s political profile could then be examined in relation to the political parties of Europe. This examination was aided by a variety of presentations, displays and analyses.

To allow the tool to reflect the personal positions of the users more accurately, they were given the option of ‘weighting’ their responses. This meant going through a list of the responses they had given and assigning a degree of personal importance to each one – very important, normal (the default position) or less important. The tool then used a complex algorithm to give greater emphasis to the positions weighted by the user as being ‘very important’, and less emphasis to those weighted as ‘less important’.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 4-2 An example of an EU Profiler ‘political landscape’ (Denmark)**



The outcome for the user was a highly accurate political profile. The process of using the tool also gave them greater awareness of the issues being debated, the intentions of the political parties running in the election and, in a more abstract sense, a greater ownership of the European democratic scene. The primary job of the EU Profiler was this: providing voters with thoroughly researched information about the policies of the political parties taking part in the European Parliament elections.

### Selecting the Parties

While it would be preferable for a party profiling tool to include every party that is running in an election, it is not always feasible from a practical and technical point of view. This was the case with the EU Profiler. The EU Profiler team tried to be as inclusive as possible and the exclusion of a party was only considered if a range of opinion polls strongly suggested that the party would not win a single seat in the election; if the party could not provide adequate documentation to be positioned on the 30 statements; or finally, if the party did not reply to the self-placement (see below) invitation. Almost every party that had a seat in the European Parliament or national parliaments and that was polling to win at least one seat in the EP was included.

### Selecting the Statements

A crucial aspect of preparing a party profiling tool is the selection of the statements used in the questionnaire. The statements chosen must be relevant to the politics of the day, cover a range of policy areas and illustrate differences between the parties involved. Early VAAs relied heavily

<sup>4</sup> For details on the EU Profiler methodology see the FAQ- and help-section of the tool.

on the parties themselves deciding which issues should be presented. This left the creators open to pressure from parties with an interest in highlighting or de-emphasising certain issues. After analysing the risks of such an approach, the EU Profiler consortium developed an alternative method that is more immune to manipulation and more likely to guarantee neutrality.

Party manifestos were analysed to understand not only how frequently certain policy areas were mentioned, but also the ‘urgency’ with which parties discussed individual issues. At the same time, opinion polls (above all the Eurobarometer), earlier party manifesto codings, groups of experts, academics and journalists were consulted on what they considered to be the key issues in the election. The various lists were then analysed together and the issues that occurred most frequently and urgently were selected for inclusion. The issues were grouped in nine policy fields covering a very large portion of contemporary democratic policy-making and attitudes toward politics in the Member States.<sup>5</sup> Based on the issue identification, the 28 general statements were developed by members of the Steering Committee and were discussed at length by numerous specialists in the field in order to make them as precise as possible. Some of the statements were taken directly from traditional survey questions (such as “European integration is a good thing”), allowing us to validate/compare our data with other sources. In addition to the 28 statements that were proposed in all countries, two country-specific questions were developed for each national (and in the case of the UK and Belgium, even regional) political context. The statements were only shown to the parties when they came to complete the self-placement questionnaire. This method did not give political parties any opportunity to influence the selection or formulation of the statements.

### **Coding the Parties**

The same approach was applied to the coding of the parties – that is the allocation of responses (‘tend to agree’ etc) to the propositions put forward in the questionnaire. While parties were given the opportunity to ‘self-place’ – to respond to the survey themselves – their final responses were allocated by a team of regional experts with access to all of the relevant documentation and information that the parties offer, such as manifestos and statements.

Each position was very carefully researched by the political scientists, who decided on the final positions by referring to a hierarchy of sources – the top being the party’s own EP election manifesto. In instances where the party had not printed any opinion, the researchers referred to other party manifestos, party websites, statements in the media and other secondary sources.

When the party self-placement and the expert coding were completed, the two results were compared. Where there were discrepancies, the party was asked to provide more support for its declared position, and a final answer was settled upon. While the parties themselves were consulted throughout, the final decision lay with the country team, offering a better chance of complete impartiality.

### **Data Use and Research**

The advantages of this tool to voters are self-evident. It enables the users/voters to evaluate their own political preferences and to compare them with the policy positions of their national parties as well as with the positions of parties in other European countries. The implications for academic research are longer-term and equally intriguing. Polling Europe-wide public opinion on some of the most critical political issues facing Europe in itself produced significant results. As not only the party positions, but also the anonymous responses of each user were stored, the EU Profiler provided the academic team with a huge amount of data on the opinion of the European electorate on the proposed statements and on other relevant issues. Of crucial importance here is the fact that all users had the opportunity to fill in an extra questionnaire with questions on demographics, media consumption, previous and general electoral behaviour and general political stances. This questionnaire, as well as the overall project, was closely

<sup>5</sup> The policy fields featured in the EU Profiler are: Welfare, Family & Health; Migration & Immigration; Society, Religion & Culture; Finances & Taxes; Economy & Work; Environment, Transport & Energy; Law & Order; Foreign Policy; European Integration; Country-Specific.

coordinated with the European Elections Studies (EES).<sup>6</sup> This coordination allowed for an even broader analysis and a comparison of data with a renowned offline survey. Furthermore, it will enable the research team to make comparisons and to work out matching techniques between traditional and online survey methods. In addition to the data on individual voting behaviour and political participation obtained from users/voters, the EU Profiler allows the gaining of new insights into the European party system and the parties themselves. Arguably, never before have the positions of almost 300 European parties been analysed on so many political statements, documented by their party programmes and other sources. This will enable the EU Profiler team to conduct various in-depth studies on voting behaviour, public opinion, campaign dynamics, political participation and party cohesion. In sum, the EU Profiler is a truly innovative tool, which uses new technologies to conduct pioneering research in the political sciences, and which offers a wealth of research material. A high level of pan-European cooperation will enable academics to make the most of these new findings. Currently, the huge amount of data is being processed and analysed and various research projects and publications will emerge from the data gained with the EU Profiler.

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<sup>6</sup> The European Election Studies were started in 1979 and have since covered all European Parliament elections. They focus on electoral participation and voting behaviour, and are concerned “with the evolution of an EU political community and a European public sphere, with citizens’ perceptions of and preferences about the EU political regime, and with their evaluations of EU political performance”. In addition to surveys among representative samples of voters, the EES include content analyses of party manifestos (“Euromanifestos”), elite surveys (candidates and deputies), and content analyses of media news. See for more details <http://www.ees-homepage.net/>.



## 5

## THE POLITICAL COMPOSITION OF THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Wojciech Gagattek<sup>1</sup>

A few months before the European Parliament elections, 44% of EU citizens believed that the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are organized into national groups, whereas only 33% correctly identified political affinities as the criterion for the formation of groups, with 23% having no opinion about it.<sup>2</sup> In explaining the political composition of the European Parliament to ordinary people, this fact should be particularly highlighted. At the beginnings of the early predecessors of the European Parliament (hereafter EP), in the 1950s, the then European parliamentarians came to the conclusion that if the EP was to play any role, then its members had to be organized in exactly the same way as those of national parliaments. For early scholars working on the topic, this was one of the most striking features of the EP at that time, leading some to herald the ‘politicisation’ of the European Parliament.<sup>3</sup> However, this somewhat optimistic outlook was cautioned by several factors that prevented the emergence of strong political groups in the EP, such as the lack of an electoral link and the relative unimportance of the EP in the institutional system of the then European Communities.

Today, membership in political groups is a prerequisite for MEPs to exert any influence on the business of the house. Although the MEPs from the same Member State often cooperate when it comes to defending national interests, the main line dividing parliamentarians is between the different parts of the political spectrum, between the left and the right. Therefore, as much as European Parliament elections are often labelled national contests without much reference to European issues, their results provide the basis of the political composition of the EP and the political, rather than national, power balance in this body.

The 2009 elections for the European Parliament reconfirmed the domination of the centre-right parties united at the European level in the European People’s Party (EPP), which managed to return 265 MEPs. The socialist and social democratic parties united in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D) continued to remain second, with more than 80 mandates less than the EPP. This brief chapter aims to present the political composition of the 2009-2014 EP, as well as the nature of the political group formations. I will start with the first of these tasks.

### The new Parliament in numbers

The European Parliament of 2009-2014 will initially be composed of 736 MEPs.<sup>4</sup> The number of MEPs is divided among the Member States on the basis of their population. In this way, the largest

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<sup>2</sup> European Parliament Eurobarometer (EB Standard 70) - autumn 2008, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb\\_special\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_en.htm), accessed June 2009.

<sup>3</sup> J. Fitzmaurice, *The party groups in the European Parliament*, Lexington Books, Lexington, 1975, p. 16.

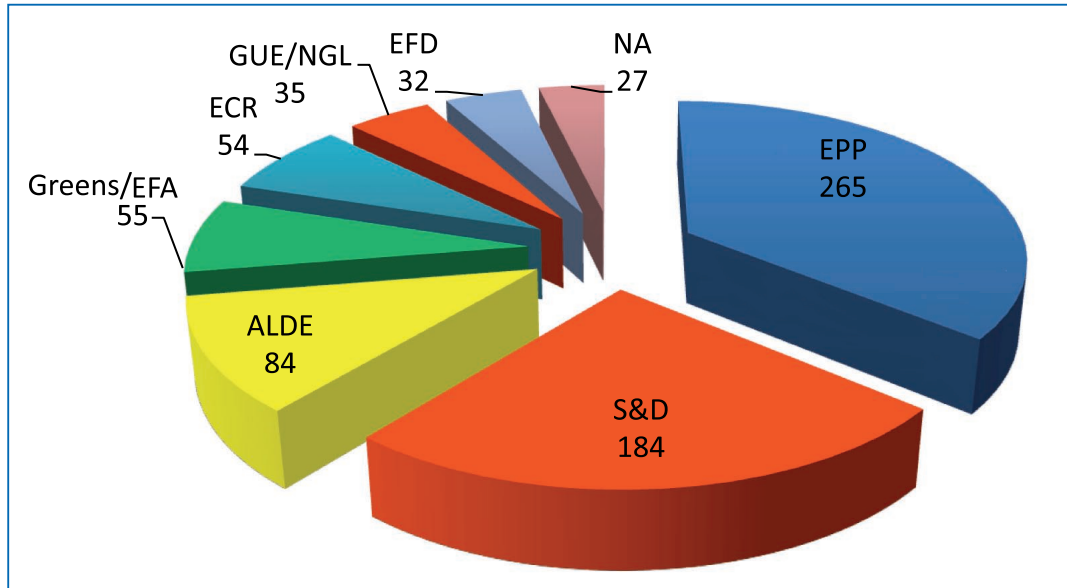
<sup>4</sup> Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (1 December 2009), the total number of MEPs will rise to 754 (until the end of the 2009-2014 legislative period). This modification is likely to enter into force during the course of 2010 or 2011, if the Treaty of Lisbon is amended by a special protocol to alter the number of seats in the European Parliament.

EU Member State, Germany, also has the largest number of MEPs (99). The opposite case is Malta, the smallest EU Member State, which elects 5 MEPs. The new Parliament has 35% women MEPs, which means a 4 percentage point increase in comparison to the previous legislature, and more than double compared to the first directly elected parliament of 1979. The Greens is the only group where there are more women than men (55%), whereas the most male group is the European Conservatives and Reformists (only 13% women). Malta, Luxembourg and the Czech Republic sent the smallest number of women (with Malta having no female MEPs), whereas Sweden and Finland are the only Member States with a majority of female MEPs (56 and 62%, respectively).<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to the political composition, deputies establish parliamentary groups according to their political affinities, as mentioned before. As in any national parliament, the political groups effectively structure the Parliament's business. They divide various positions of influence (such as the chairmanships of various parliamentary committees) and jobs (such as the drafting of parliamentary reports) between themselves. When it comes to the balance of power within a political group, the stronger a given national political party within a political group (the more MEPs it has), the more influence it can gain. In a nutshell, although there are some important differences between the organization of political groups in the European Parliament and in the national parliaments, the basic organizational system is the same.

The two charts below provide details of the political composition of the EP. The first shows the political groups by numbers of seats. The next figure compares the strength of political groups in the previous (2004-2009) and the current (2009-2014) legislature. As of this new term of the European Parliament, the number of MEPs has been reduced from 785 to 736.<sup>6</sup> In these circumstances, the best way to compare the balance of power is to compare the percentage of seats controlled by each political group. Subsequently, I will explain this power balance by analysing the political group formations and compositions in the current legislature.

**Figure 5-1 Political Composition of the European Parliament after the 2009 elections**



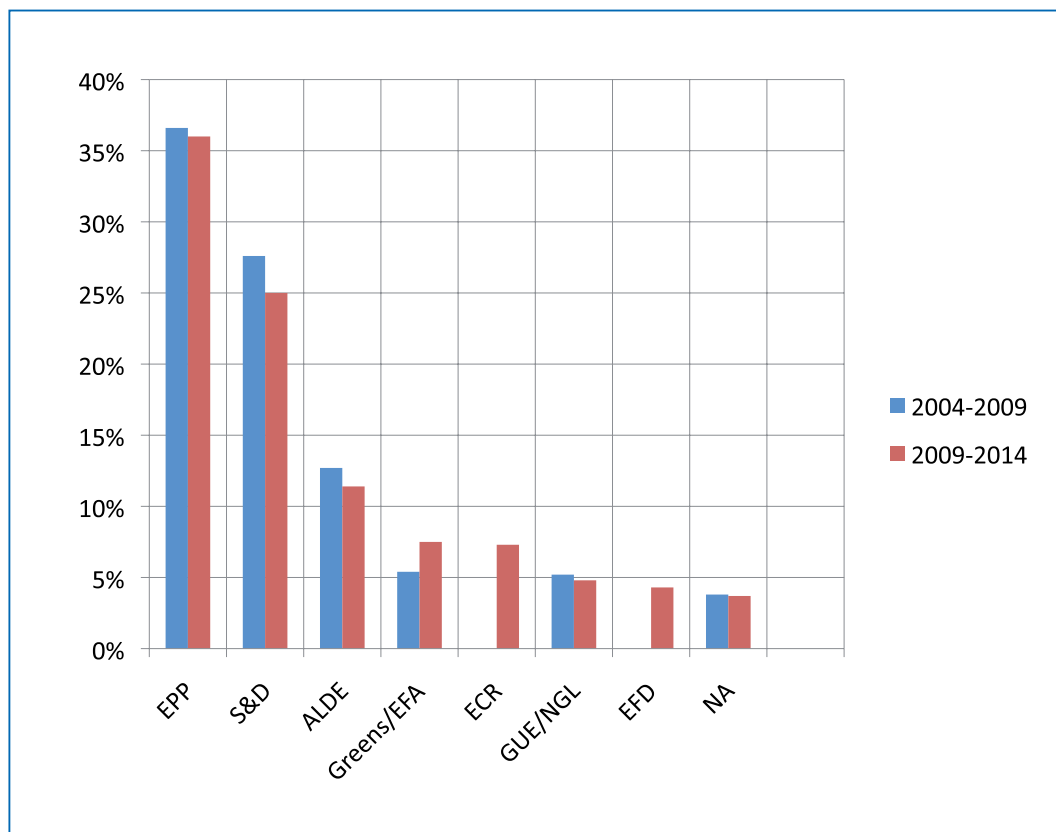
Source: the European Parliament. July 2009

<sup>5</sup> For details, see the website of the European Parliament, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/public/geoSearch.do?language=EN>.

<sup>6</sup> When Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, they immediately held their first elections for the European Parliament. The 53 MEPs that they elected increased the total number of MEPs to 786. However, the Treaty of Nice indicated that the maximum number of MEPs shall be 736. Therefore, in order to accommodate the entry of Bulgaria and Romania and at the same time keep the total number of 736, the number of MEPs from 21 Member States was reduced.



**Figure 5-2 The percentage of seats controlled by EP political groups in the previous and current legislature**



**Abbreviations:**

EPP - The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)

S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament

ALDE - Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Greens/EFA - The Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament

ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group (established in July 2009)

GUE/NGL - Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left

EFD - Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (established in July 2009)

NA - Non-attached

**Political group formation**

Already in the first legislature of the European Parliament, back in the 1950s, there were three political groups: Christian democrats, socialists and liberals. The Christian democrats and socialists influenced the functioning of this body to the largest extent, due to their numerical supremacy. Today the deputies of these three groups, the European People's Party (Christian democrats, EPP), The Progressive Alliance of Socialist and Democrats (S&D), and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), constitute 72% of the entire legislature. There are also four other groups: the Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA), the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), the European United Left/Nordic Green Alliance (GUE/NGL), and the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD). Finally, 27 MEPs remain unattached to any political group. The important condition for the recognition and registration of political groups is that they must unite at least 25 MEPs from at least 7 Member States, which has proved an important obstacle to the establishment of smaller political groups. In the section below, I will try to briefly introduce the group formations with a view to their membership and programme profile, and also review the election results of the most important member parties. More details can be found on the websites of each of the political groups listed below.

### **Group of the European People's Party (EPP)**

The EPP Group was the largest group from the beginning of the Parliament until 1975 (when the socialists became the largest group for 24 years), and then again since 1999. Although the EPP originated as primarily a Christian democratic group, in the early 1990s it decided to enlarge its programme profile in order to cut the distance from the socialists. At this time it invited into its ranks conservatives (both British and Nordic) and the Italian Forza Italia, and managed to regain the majority in the house after the 1999 elections. However, today its programme profile is much larger than just Christian democracy, not only due to the membership enlargements of the 1990s, but also due to the arrival of new members from Central and Eastern Europe, which further added to the group's very wide programme profile. Hence, the EPP describes itself as "the mainstream of centre and centre-right political forces from across the Member States of the European Union".<sup>7</sup> Its most important and largest national political parties are the German Christian Democratic Party/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the French Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Polish Civic Platform (PO), the Italian People for Liberty (PDL) and the Spanish People's Party (PP). These five national delegations within the EPP constitute almost 60% of the entire group's membership. Up to the end of the previous legislature, the British Conservatives were also EPP members, but from this term onwards they have decided to split and create their own group (see below). Despite this loss, the very good election result of the EPP can be particularly attributed to large gains in Poland (+13 MEPs), France and Italy (+11 each), which altogether mitigated the loss of the British Conservatives.

### **The Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D)**

As mentioned above, for a long time, up until 1999, the socialist group was the largest political group in the EP. However, in 1999 it lost its majority due both to electoral losses and also to the successful enlargements of the membership base of its main competitor, the EPP. Before the 2009 elections, socialist were the dominant parties of government in only 9 out of 27 Member States. However, they hoped to win the majority back due to the financial and economic crisis growing at this time in all the Member States, which was expected to hit the governing centre-right. Given that the second-order elections thesis predicts that governing parties usually lose EP elections (see Trechsel in this volume), such an ambition could have been justified. However, as it turned out, not only did the socialists fail to win the majority back, but they also did much worse than expected, returning only 161 MEPs and winning in only six EU Member States (Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Romania, Malta, and Slovakia). They did especially badly in France (down from 31 to 14 MEPs) and in the Netherlands (down from 7 to 3 MEPs). They further lost a substantial number of seats in Germany and the UK.

However, these losses were slightly mitigated by the enlargement of the previous socialist group by the Italian Democratic Party. In the previous legislature some MEPs from the Democratic Party belonged to the socialist group (referred to then as the Group of the Party of European Socialists, PES) and others to the liberal ALDE Group. From this legislature onwards, all of them have decided to join the socialists, with the resulting name of the Progressive Group of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, amounting to 182 MEPs.

### **The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**

In the previous legislature, the liberals reached their greatest success ever, increasing their representation to 100 MEPs. This position allowed them to collaborate with either the socialist group or the EPP in those areas where it could find common language. Although the vote share of the ALDE Group has decreased (down from 12.7% in the previous legislature to 11.4% in the current one, with 84 MEPs in total after the 2009 elections), they are likely to play the same strategy of building coalition agreements either with the EPP or the S&D depending on the specific issue. The liberal parties did particularly well in Germany, where they doubled their score (from 6.1% in 2004 to 11% in 2009). Other important members of this group are the British Liberal Democrats and the French MoDem.

<sup>7</sup> For more details see <http://www.eppgroup.eu/home/en/aboutus.asp>, accessed 23.11.2009.

### **Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA)**

The Greens have been steadily increasing their vote share since 1999, when together with regionalists from the European Free Alliance (EFA) they became the fourth largest group. The late 1990s are also remembered as the time when many Green parties entered the governments of several EU Member States as coalition partners. In 2009 they managed to increase their vote share once again and achieved their best result ever. This was because of very good results in France, where they were almost on a par with the Socialists (16.28 against 16.48% of the vote), and Germany, where they became the third political force and pushed the Liberals into fourth position. While for many years this group has been centred on climate change and environmental protection, in this campaign they also tried to establish their credibility in other areas, such as financial and economic issues. It is also worth mentioning that their campaigns in all the EU Member States were particularly targeted against the re-nomination of José Manuel Barroso for the Commission Presidency, whom they criticized for neglecting climate change, among many other issues.

### **The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)**

The creation of this new conservative group represents a major novelty in the political composition of the European Parliament 2009-2014. Its membership base primarily comprises the British Conservatives, Polish Law and Justice (PiS), Czech Civic Democrats (ODS), and single members from a few other Member States. Its creation can be mainly explained by the decision of the Conservative leader, David Cameron, to cut links with what the Conservatives considered the too federalist EPP Group, in which they had sat since 1992, and promote a non-federalist, anti-bureaucratic agenda for the EU. The Czech ODS followed suit, together with the Polish Law and Justice Party, which in the previous legislature belonged to the now defunct Group of the Europe of Nations (UEN).

### **The Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)**

Since the fairly long name is difficult to remember, many insiders refer to this group simply as the communists. Indeed, this is the most left-leaning group in the entire Parliament, being composed of extreme-left parties, whose name often contains the word communist. Although it often emphasizes its support for the idea of European integration, at the same time it strongly criticizes its current form, which in the group's opinion has been influenced by neoliberal ideas of free market competition while dismissing the traditional leftist values, such as the fight to reduce unemployment. The largest members of this group are the German Party of the Left (Die Linke, 8 seats), various French parties (5 seats in total) and the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (4 seats).

### **Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)**

Although Euro-sceptics have been present in the European Parliament for many years, they have usually had difficulties in creating their own group. Simply put, apart from the general Euro-scepticism they all shared, there were few other issues over which they could find a compromise. Therefore, given the strict rules relating to political group formation (see above), they were unable to create a coherent grouping until the 2004 European Parliament. At that time the Group of Independence and Democracy was created (IND/DEM), which can be regarded as the direct predecessor of the newly created Europe of Freedom and Democracy. EFD membership consists primarily of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), formerly member of IND/DEM Group, and the Italian Northern League (Lega Nord), which in the previous legislature belonged to the Group of the Europe of Nations (UEN).

### **Non-Attached Members**

Lastly, we need to mention a few national parties that have failed to enter the existing political groups, or have decided to go independently. Among these are the most controversial parties in Europe, such as the British National Party (BNP) with 2 MEPs, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) with 4 MEPs and the Dutch anti-immigrant Party for Freedom (PVV), represented by 4 deputies. Although these parties cannot be put into one basket, one thing they certainly

share is that practically speaking they have no influence on the Parliament's business. For example, although the election of the first two MEPs from the British National Party made headlines across Europe, as the practice of the first few months of the new Parliament shows, it is difficult to find evidence of their impact on this body at all. This is due to the fact that because of the formal and informal rules of the parliamentary work, the political groups, rather than individual members, shape the functioning of the Parliament. Being unattached therefore means condemning themselves to a lack of any role or influence.

### **Conclusions: Continuity and change in the political composition of the European Parliament**

Does the political composition of the European Parliament 2009-2014 represent any novelty? At the time of writing it is still too early to judge whether this is the case, except for the most obvious developments reviewed above. However, in order to fully understand how this Parliament might function from the political point of view, we need to analyse at least three main areas: coalition building, the internal power balance within the groups and the general impact of the Parliament on EU business. As far as coalition building is concerned, the European Parliament so far has been characterised by a lack of any steady coalitions, and this was one of its differences from the majority of national parliaments. Recent events regarding the nomination of José Manuel Barroso for the Commission presidency have shown some potential for a greater level of cooperation between political groups along the left-right dimension. It will therefore be interesting to see in which direction coalition building will develop in this Parliament. Second, although the overall political composition of the new European Parliament largely resembles the previous one, the election results in individual Member States led to important shifts in the power balance at the level of individual political groups. For example, within the largest political group, the EPP, the leverage of the previously dominant Germans was reduced due to their electoral losses, whereas the Poles, French and Italians, thanks to their good electoral fortunes, became stronger. Similar cases should be analysed in the other political groups with a view to assessing whether these shifts can have any impact on the Parliament's business. Finally, with each new Treaty revision, the prerogatives of the Parliament are strengthened. The Treaty of Lisbon provided the EP with new opportunities to make further steps in increasing its general role vis-à-vis the other institutions, particularly the European Commission. We will need to observe to what extent the Parliament makes use of these new prerogatives in developing its controlling functions against the Commission and increasing its already significant role in the legislative process.

The websites of EP Political Groups:

EPP: <http://www.eppgroup.eu/home/en/default.asp?lg1=en>

S&D: <http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/>

ALDE: <http://www.alde.eu/en/>

Greens/EFA: <http://www.greens-efa.org/cms/default/rubrik/6/6270.htm>

ECR : <http://www.ecrgroup.eu/>

GUE/NGL : <http://www.guengl.eu/>

EFD : <http://www.efdgroupp.eu/>

**Section II**  
**Country Reports**



## 6

## AUSTRIA

Theresa Kuhn, Fabio Wolkenstein, Flooh Perlot and Sarah Meyer<sup>1</sup>

### Background

After 18 months of continuous dissent, the grand coalition between the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) breached in 2008 due to a U-turn in the SPÖ's stance on EU policy: in an open letter to the powerful tabloid *Neue Kronen Zeitung*,<sup>2</sup> then-chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer stated that future EU treaties would be subject to referenda in Austria, thus undermining the government's official stance on European integration.

The subsequent snap elections in autumn 2008 were marked by the worst ever election results for the leading parties (SPÖ: 29.26%; ÖVP: 25.98%) and a remarkable comeback of the far right. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and its splinter Alliance for Austria's Future (BZÖ), which was formed in 2005 by Jörg Haider following intra-party dissent, together accumulated 28.34% of the vote. The leader of the Greens stepped down after his party had performed far below its expectations.

The success of the far right was partly due to dissatisfaction over the constant rows between the governing parties.<sup>3</sup> While grand coalitions used to be an acclaimed recipe for ensuring democratic stability in the post-war period, they are now seen as a major cause of political deadlock. However, facing the dilemma of forming a grand coalition yet again (and thus creating more breeding ground for the far right) or cooperating with the far right, the SPÖ coalesced with the ÖVP.<sup>4</sup> In December 2008, the new government was sworn in under chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ).

The far right dominated media coverage in Austria and abroad. Shortly after his party's stunning election success, notorious far right leader Jörg Haider (BZÖ) died in a car crash due to alcohol abuse. His death sparked collective mourning among his admirers and national soul searching among his critics. While pundits expected the BZÖ to collapse without Haider,<sup>5</sup> it easily won the regional elections in his stronghold of Carinthia. Equally controversial was the election of right-wing extremist Martin Graf (FPÖ) as one of the three Presidents of the Parliament.

<sup>1</sup> Theresa Kuhn, PhD Candidate, European University Institute, Florence; Fabio Wolkenstein and Flooh Perlot, Institute for Strategic Analysis, Vienna; Sarah Meyer, PhD Candidate, University of Vienna.

<sup>2</sup> *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, is not only Europe's most successful daily newspaper in terms of its net coverage, but also a powerful political actor, which constantly promotes its own agenda and sometimes succeeds in pressuring Austrian politicians accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> P. Filzmaier, 'Ein Regierungsdesaster: Analyse der Nationalratswahlen 2008' in *Österreichisches Jahrbuch Für Politik 2008*, A. Khol et al. (eds.), Böhlau Verlag, Vienna, 2008, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> A. Pelinka, 'Who Is the Winner?: The Strategic Dilemma Of "The People's Choice"' in *The Changing Austrian Voter*, G. Bischof and F. Plasser (eds.), Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2008, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> P.A. Ulram, 'Ein verspielter Sieg und eine siegreiche Zeitungspartei – Zur Analyse der Nationalratswahl 2008' in *Österreichisches Jahrbuch Für Politik 2008*, A. Khol et al. (eds.), Böhlau Verlag, Vienna, 2008, p. 20.

## Issues

Most notably, Euroscepticism in Austria is strong and stable. Hence, the public discourse about Europe tends to be critical and the EU is often used as a scapegoat. The attitudes of Austrian parties towards Europe range from increasing scepticism to open rejection, resembling the general public opinion. 44% of Austria's population believes that Europe is developing in the wrong direction, whilst 26% believe that the EU is on the right trajectory. Generally speaking, Austrians are very pessimistic about Europe's future development, and only 39% believe that Austria's EU-membership is a good thing.<sup>6</sup> Those who are sceptical about Europe feel that their country has practically no voice in it and that decisions in Brussels are made regardless of their demands.<sup>7</sup>

Euroscepticism essentially plays to the right-wing FPÖ and BZÖ parties but also prompted other parties to bring in EU-critical notions. The right-wing parties intend to safeguard Austria's national identity against a 'centralising' and over-bureaucratic EU whilst keeping migrants at bay. Both parties are strongly opposed to Turkey's accession and regularly link the problem of rising criminality to EU-enlargement. Strong xenophobic tendencies and the controversial FPÖ campaign triggered a heated debate. In contrast, the ÖVP adopted a strong pro-European position by arguing for a "more self-confident EU"<sup>8</sup> and by stressing the importance of a strong Euro, whilst being critical of neoliberal tendencies and improvident EU enlargement. This, however, has to be interpreted rather as a consequence of campaign dynamics than as their general standpoint.

Against the background of the current financial crisis and broad public concern about inflation, the call for a more social European Union and the criticism of its assumed neoliberal direction were essential and predominant issues and could be found in most of the party programmes. Additionally, to a certain extent these served as a shortcut to other issues, in particular concerning the repercussions of the global financial crisis, such as unemployment, social security and measures for better control of the financial markets (such as the implementation of the Tobin Tax, a tax on all currency trade across borders). The appeal for more direct participation by means of referenda on future EU treaties remained a point of contention between and within parties. The perceived democratic deficit further supported Austrian Euroscepticism. Migration issues were also closely linked to the campaign as were xenophobic stereotypes, demonstrated for instance by demands to reinstate border controls to fight off criminals from Eastern Europe. However, concrete topics were generally absent and the national perspective remained predominant.

The EP elections received media coverage from the Austrian national broadcasting service ORF, which launched a series of special programmes relating to the candidates – the Sunday morning talk show *Pressestunde*, portraits of the top candidates, and round table talks, like *Bürgerforum* – and general information about the elections. Lower circulation newspapers such as *Die Presse* and *Der Standard*, through their online platforms (<http://diepresse.com/>, <http://derstandard.at/>) reported extensively on the campaigns, parties and current EU events. The tabloid *Neue Kronen Zeitung* took a very strong EU-critical line,<sup>9</sup> as it did during the 2008 national election campaign.

However, the EU and its (governing) processes are not a matter of intense media (and public) attention in Austria, as newspapers and TV programmes focus on campaign coverage – a fact that consistently stirs broad criticism of the lack of information about the EU. Neither were the EP elections, reflecting their second-order character.

<sup>6</sup> Standard - Eurobarometer 70/Herbst 2008, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_first\\_de.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_de.pdf), accessed 6.6.2009.

<sup>7</sup> A. Füreder and I. Wiener, 'Niemand kann Österreich zu etwas zwingen' in *Der Standard*, 13.5.2009, <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=1241622697254>, accessed 6.6.2009.

<sup>8</sup> E. Strasser, 'Strasser im Chat: EU muss selbstbewusster werden' in *Die Presse*, 14.5.2009, [http://diepresse.com/home/politik/eu/479180/index.do?\\_vl\\_backlink=/home/politik/eu/index.do](http://diepresse.com/home/politik/eu/479180/index.do?_vl_backlink=/home/politik/eu/index.do), accessed 14.5.2009.

<sup>9</sup> M. Rauscher and A. Kröpfel, 'Es ist nicht schwer, Vorurteile gegen die EU zu verstärken!' in *Der Standard*, 13.5.2009, <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=1241622697040>, accessed 19.5.2009.



## The election campaign

The Austrian parties and candidates officially launched their campaigns in early May. However, media coverage of the EP elections had already started in January, when parties were looking for front-runners. Whilst the FPÖ and, eventually, the SPÖ decided in favour of current MEPs Andreas Mölzer (FPÖ) and Hannes Swoboda (SPÖ), the ÖVP and the Greens presented “new” candidates. For the Greens, the previous front runner and well-established MEP Johannes Voggenhuber, known both for his expertise and his harsh public criticism of the party leadership, was replaced by Ulrike Lunacek, MP and co-speaker of the European Greens. Supported by prominent Green members and one regional Green party group, Voggenhuber then tried to be put on the end of the party list. Given his popularity, he would probably have outperformed Lunacek due to a high number of preferential votes.<sup>10</sup> After a heated debate, the party executive committee decided not to put him on the list. This was interpreted as a signal of the Greens re-positioning towards a more critical EU position – something that did not turn out to be the case during the campaign – and sparked a debate on the dominance of women under the new – female – party leadership, given that the top 3 places on the party list were ‘occupied’ by female candidates.

The ÖVP nominated former Interior Minister Ernst Strasser, known as a hardliner on asylum and migration policy and criticized for his personnel policy,<sup>11</sup> instead of MEP Othmar Karas. This triggered huge criticism within the ÖVP, and from former party leaders and ministers openly supporting Karas. Whilst this was judged as intra-party dissent over the party’s stance towards European integration by several observers, the party leadership presented it as a mobilization strategy and actively promoted both candidates during the campaign.

The BZÖ, competing in EP elections for the first time, nominated Ewald Stadler, who had been a member of the German nationalist wing of the FPÖ before he left the party in 2007. This ultraconservative Catholic is known for sympathizing with the highly controversial Society of St. Pius X, whose member Richard Williamson made headlines in early 2009 for openly denying the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> Until 2006 Stadler was a member of the *Volksanwaltschaft*, the ombudsman of the Austrian Parliament.

After guesses that he might run for Libertas, MEP Hans-Peter Martin announced his individual candidateship in April. Strongly supported by *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, he had won 2 seats in the 2004 EP elections and polls forecast a similar success for 2009.

The candidates and campaigns of the other parties running in the election, the communists (KPÖ) and the young liberals (Julis), failed to gain importance. This is consistent with Austrian national elections, where the communist and liberal parties do not play a significant role.

During the campaign, the parties failed to address concrete issues. While the SPÖ tried to promote a social Europe, the ÖVP was more present in terms of intra-party competition between candidates. The Greens, calling for a Green New Deal, focused on ecology and social issues. The BZÖ presented their candidate Stadler as Austrian Ombudsman (*Volksanwalt*) in Brussels and heavily campaigned against asylum seekers and EU asylum policy. Martin stuck to his strategy of presenting himself as a muckraker.

The overall campaign, however, was dominated by the FPÖ. Mobilizing against “EU asylum lunacy” and the possible EU membership of Turkey and Israel (!), the FPÖ used slogans such as “The West in the hands of Christianity” and “For Austria, against the EU and the Financial Mafia”. During the campaign, FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian (‘HC’) Strache was referred to as a hatemonger and was heavily criticized not only by other parties but also by representatives of churches and religious communities and the Federal President, Heinz Fischer, for abusing

<sup>10</sup> In 2004, Voggenhuber gained over 30,000 preferential votes, more than any other candidate.

<sup>11</sup> G. Sperl, ‘Der Pröll-Strasser Kurs: Schweigen zur FPÖ’ in *Der Standard*, 24.5.2009, <http://derstandard.at/fs/1242316547407/Gerfried-Sperl-Der-ProellStrasserKurs-Schweigen-zur-FPOe>, accessed 13.6.2009.

<sup>12</sup> E. Stadler, ‘Fragen an Mag. Ewald Stadler’, on the *Plattform for direct democracy*, [http://www.meinparlament.at/mag\\_ewald\\_stadler-10815-18646.html](http://www.meinparlament.at/mag_ewald_stadler-10815-18646.html), accessed 13.6.2009.

religious symbols for political purposes. Chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ) and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger (ÖVP) called for the resignation of Martin Graf (FPÖ) as President of the Austrian Parliament after anti-Semitic remarks against the President of the Jewish Community in Austria.<sup>13</sup> Since the FPÖ at the same time was calling for a veto against the accession of Israel to the EU, this was also important background to the EP election campaign.

Europarties did not play any role in the parties' campaigns, with the Greens being a slight exception. They heavily promoted the slogan of the European Greens, the "Green New Deal".

Experts estimate that parties spent between a tenth and a third of the budget used in national election campaigns for their EP election campaign.<sup>14</sup> The official amounts published by parties at the beginning of the campaign were: 3.5 million euros for the SPÖ and ÖVP; 1.5 million for the BZÖ; 1.2 million for the Greens; 1 million for the FPÖ; and 500,000 euros for Martin, who declared that he financed his campaign from his own resources.

Together with newspaper advertisements, placards traditionally play an important role in Austrian election campaigns, while TV spots are of no importance: political advertisements on the *ORF* are forbidden and private TV stations still only reach a very small audience.

While all national party leaders supported their candidates in one way or another, Heinz-Christian Strache took centre stage in the FPÖ campaign. He was pictured on the placards and was keynote speaker at FPÖ campaign events. The FPÖ presented a "HC EU-Rap" named "Austria first" and produced a cartoon targeted at young voters, presenting Strache as superhero "HC", "fighting for freedom and against a central EU". The fact that the comic strip was financed by the FPÖ's academy of education was strongly criticized by other parties, since party academies receive public funding but are not allowed to spend it on party political advertising.

The FPÖ was not the only party to be put under scrutiny for its campaign material. Information on the elections sent by the Ministry of the Interior (ÖVP) was designed in the same style as the ÖVP campaign; the Austrian ombudsmanship sued BZÖ's Stadler for misleadingly labelling himself ombudsman.

The *Neue Kronen Zeitung's* support for Hans-Peter Martin was unique. The powerful tabloid printed one or two pages of excerpts from his latest book on the European Union every day in the run-up to the elections and actively promoted him in its overall coverage.

At the beginning of the campaign, polls suggested a neck-and-neck race between the governing SPÖ and ÖVP parties (each close to 30%, but with the SPÖ leading), a strong increase for the FPÖ (between 16 and 19%) and losses for Martin (6-9%) and the Greens (around 9%). The BZÖ, running in EP elections for the first time, was seen at 5% (with Predict09 as an exception). In the two weeks prior to the election, polls forecast a victory for the ÖVP (28-30%) and about 26% for the SPÖ. They did not suggest any change for the Greens and the BZÖ, but ranked Martin higher (13-14%) and the FPÖ between 15 and 16%.<sup>15</sup>

## Results

The EP elections were the first federal election test for the grand coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP), which was formed in December 2008. Against the backdrop of public discontent about European integration, anti-European and xenophobic rhetoric dominated the EP election campaign. Parties failed to bring in substantive issues and focused on turf-battles between their candidates. Not surprisingly, eurosceptic populist

<sup>13</sup> Judicially, it is not possible to force Presidents of the Austrian Parliament to resign.

<sup>14</sup> P. Filzmaier, 'Die Analyse nach der Elefantenrunde' in *ORF-ZIB2*, 2.6.2009; *DerStandard.at*, 'EU-Wahlen reißen kein Loch in Parteikassen', 15.2.2009, <http://derstandard.at/fs/1234506987615/EUWahlen-reissen-kein-Loch-in-Parteikasse>, accessed 8.6.2009.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the election polls see the *Austrian Online Platform for European Politics*, <http://www.europapolitik.at/news/umfragen>, accessed 8.6.2009.

candidate Hans-Peter Martin and the far right succeeded at the ballots while the governing parties and the Greens achieved poor results.

**Table 6-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections - Austria**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
People's Party	ÖVP	29.9	6	EPP
Social Democratic Party	SPÖ	23.7	4	S&D
List Hans Peter Martin	MARTIN	17.7	3	NA
Freedom Party	FPÖ	12.7	2	NA
Greens	Grüne	9.9	2	G/EFA
Alliance for the Future of Austria	BZÖ	4.6	0	-
Young Liberals Austria	JuLis	0.7	0	-
Communist Party	KPÖ	0.7	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>17</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 45.97%; Election Threshold 4% (due to the mathematical formula for distributing the seats, almost 5% was necessary for a party to secure a mandate)

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; G/EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; NA: Non-attached.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/austria\\_en.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/austria_en.html), accessed October 2009.

The election saw a defeat for the governing Social Democrats. The SPÖ lost about 10 percentage points and suffered its worst election result ever. Although their coalition partner ÖVP lost three percentage points as well, it claimed to be victorious, becoming the strongest party and distancing itself from the SPÖ, which came in second.

The elections were a success for Hans Peter Martin and the FPÖ, which both managed to significantly increase their votes. While the BZÖ received almost 5% of the votes, it could not secure a seat. Finally, the Greens lost votes but could still hold their two seats.

Due to the conflict over the ÖVP frontrunner and the subsequent campaign for preferential votes, initially second-placed Othmar Karas obtained over 100,000 preferential votes and moved up to the top of the party list. However, he did not benefit from this result, as he was denied the leadership of the ÖVP delegation in the EP.

The main reason for the SPÖ's poor result was its failure to mobilise its voters, especially in comparison to the ÖVP. Neither did it succeed in gaining any new voters. As the election turnout remained very low, the important voter movements did not take place between the parties but between voters and non-voters. Subsequently, the success of Hans Peter Martin and the FPÖ was based on many 2004 non-voters.<sup>16</sup>

The turnout remained relatively constant: about 46% of the electorate cast their vote. However, this number is very low compared to national elections, where turnout reached 79% in 2008. The main reason for voters to abstain from the election was the lack of attractive parties and candidates.<sup>17</sup> Most parties failed to give the voters a reason to participate in a European election.

<sup>16</sup> Institute for Social Research and Analysis (SORA), 'ORF voter transition analysis', 7.6.2009, <http://www.sora.at/de/start.asp?b=554>, accessed 8.6.2009.

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Strategic Analysis (ISA)/Institute for Social Research and Analysis (SORA), 'ORF exit polls', 7.6.2009, [http://www.strategieanalysen.at/dl/isa\\_sora\\_europawahl2009.pdf](http://www.strategieanalysen.at/dl/isa_sora_europawahl2009.pdf), accessed 8.6.2009.

Dissatisfaction with the European Union and its exponents was also an important motive for staying at home. Looking at the candidates, only Hans Peter Martin was a significant mobilising factor for his voters.

A majority of Austrians who think that EU membership is a bad thing voted for the Freedom Party (39%) or Hans Peter Martin (31%). Voters tending to be satisfied with Europe predominantly voted for the ÖVP or the SPÖ. Among EU sceptics, the turnout dropped to 37%, while 54% of voters in favour of the EU participated in the elections.

## 7

## BELGIUM

Kaat Smets, Kris Van Berendoncks and Steven Van Hecke<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Belgium is a single country, but politically speaking it is composed of two entities: Flanders and francophone Belgium (Wallonia and the capital city Brussels, in which French is the dominant language). Each of these entities has its own party system. In the absence of state-wide parties, regional parties compete with each other in elections organised at the different levels, including the European elections. Although Belgium became a federal state composed of three language communities (Dutch-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking) and three territorial regions, the state reform process has not finished yet, at least as far as the Flemish political elite is concerned. The fact that the European elections took place simultaneously with regional elections, that elections are only fought internally within Flanders and francophone Belgium, and that the country long suffered from a political crisis, severely coloured the picture against which Belgium went to the polls on 7 June 2009.

After the federal election of June 2007, Belgium went through one of its most tumultuous periods in post-war political history with a government formation that was an outlier in terms of duration (193 days), composition, and the number of cabinets taking office after the election.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the liberal *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR), all the parties in the so-called purple coalition headed by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (OpenVLD), the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), the *Socialistische Partij Anders* in an electoral cartel with leftist regionalists (sp. a-spirit), and the liberal *Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* (OpenVLD), were severely punished in the 2007 federal elections. The newly-formed and rightist populist *Lijst Dedecker* (LDD) took many by surprise as it passed the 5% threshold. The extreme rightwing *Vlaams Belang*, on the other hand, for the first time in its history was unable to increase its vote share. In terms of votes and seats, the victory of the *Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams* (CD&V) – in an electoral cartel with the small Flemish separatist *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (N-VA) – was the most apparent. The Green parties *Groen!* and *Ecolo* were also on the winning side.

CD&V and N-VA took the lead in the government formation process by trying to establish a centre-right coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals. Due to a fundamental disagreement between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking parties on state reform issues, the effort was unsuccessful. It marked the beginning of Belgium's largest political crisis in post-war history. After several failed rounds of negotiations, King Albert ultimately appointed Verhofstadt (who was still leading the 'purple' caretaker government) to form a temporary government that could deal with the most urgent issues the country was facing.<sup>3</sup> As part of the coalition

<sup>1</sup> Kaat Smets, PhD Candidate, European University Institute, Florence; Kris Van Berendoncks, University of Antwerp; Steven Van Hecke, University of Antwerp and K.U.Leuven.

<sup>2</sup> B. Rihoux, P. Dumont, L. De Winter, D. Bol and S. Deruette, 'Belgium', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 47 (7-8), 2008, pp. 917-928.

<sup>3</sup> J.-B. Pilet and E. Van Haute, 'The federal elections in Belgium, June 2007', *Electoral Studies*, vol. 27 (3), 2008, pp. 547-551.

agreement, Yves Leterme (CD&V), who gained the highest number of votes, became the new Prime Minister on 23 March. In July, he failed to reach an agreement on state reform issues but King Albert refused to allow him to step down. In December, however, Leterme was left with little choice but to resign amidst the so-called 'Fortisgate',<sup>4</sup> in which the highest court indicated that government officials had tried to influence a judicial procedure. Former Minister of the Budget Herman van Rompuy (CD&V) was sworn in as Prime Minister on December 30th 2008: the third PM in one year.<sup>5</sup>

In Belgium, both federal and regional elections are considered first-order elections, second come local elections, and European and provincial elections can be labelled as 'last order'. Electoral rules vary from one level to the other. For the elections to the European Parliament, Belgium consists of four districts and three electoral colleges. Seats for the 2009 election were allocated according to the following distribution code: 13 representatives in the Dutch-speaking electoral college, 8 representatives in the French-speaking electoral college and one representative in the German-speaking electoral college. Since Dutch-speaking politicians are elected in Flemish districts and French-speaking politicians in French-speaking districts, neither group is involved in the campaigns within the other's territory. For European elections Belgium uses a semi-open list system of proportional representation (D'Hondt) with *suppléants* replacing those elected that do not take their seats.<sup>6</sup>

### Issues

The financial and economic crises did not challenge the traditional pro-European attitude among the Christian Democratic, Socialist and Liberal parties on either side of the language border. On the contrary, 'more Europe' was the commonly advocated recipe in order to get rid of the worldwide recession and its domestic effects. Moreover, the crises were not the only subject of widespread agreement. Almost all party programmes supported the so-called climate change package and at the same time they included a plea for a similar European approach with regard to energy security, as well as a truly European foreign policy.

Because of the lack of controversy about the goals that should be set, in Flanders the public debate focussed on the timing and the means to reach them. As the head of the European list for the Flemish Liberals, Verhofstadt (OpenVLD) launched a number of ambitious proposals to tackle the crisis. Explicitly referring to and quoting US President Barack Obama, the core of Verhofstadt's voluntarist message was a plea for more active leadership compared to the way the European Commission had acted so far, and a pan-European recovery plan, instead of several national and often badly-coordinated initiatives. Verhofstadt's main rival and the other former prime minister taking part in the European election campaign, Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V), deliberately chose not to engage in a debate on the ideological foundations of the 'Verhofstadt plan'. Although more moderate in his criticism of Commission President Barroso, Dehaene admitted that he was also disappointed in the way the crisis had been handled by the EU. At the same time he confirmed the need for long-term financial reform and investment while arguing in favour of more realistic and short-term solutions. According to Dehaene, the real fight was not between voluntarism and pragmatism, neither was it about goals, means and timing. Instead it was a fight against euro-sceptics or so-called euro-realists. Therefore, in his view, pro-integrationist forces should be united, irrespective of party political differences.

Indeed, unlike francophone Belgium, Flanders witnessed a sudden rise in euro-sceptic discourse. New kid on the block *Lijst Dedecker* claimed to provide a 'realist' answer to people's

<sup>4</sup> Stakeholders of Fortis, the largest Belgian bank, which almost went bankrupt but was saved by government intervention in the course of September 2008, sued the government after it had sold the Belgian part of the bank to a French competitor without having consulted them.

<sup>5</sup> When Herman van Rompuy was elected the first permanent President of the European Council (19 November 2009), he stepped down as Prime Minister of Belgium and was replaced by Yves Leterme.

<sup>6</sup> S. Depauw and S. Van Hecke, 'Brussel-Straatsburg enkele reis? De Belgische Europarlementsleden sinds 1979' in S. Fiers (ed.), *De gekozen politieke elite in Vlaanderen doorgelicht*, 2006, pp. 143-162.

worries about European integration. The extreme-right *Vlaams Belang*, which had been very critical about European integration ever since its foundation, largely shared this analysis but added a nationalistic framework to its diagnosis. The party favoured strong national states and parliaments to prevent the establishment of a European federal super-state. Instead, the Union should fight against fraud and bureaucracy, and not grant Turkey membership but rebuild itself as a 'fortress' against the so-called islamisation of Europe.

All the francophone parties, as well as the Flemish Socialists and Greens, strongly supported the entry of Turkey. The Greens tried to play the 'never waste a crisis' momentum by centring their campaign on a 'Green New Deal'. A call for sustainable energy and the transition towards a carbon-low and innovation-oriented economy was also supported by the Socialists, albeit to a lesser degree. As is traditional, the latter first and foremost emphasised social issues: the crisis was a neoliberal failure that had triggered, much more than before, the need for stronger social safeguards, such as public healthcare and investments in childcare as well as new initiatives to fight child poverty.

All in all, the main positions taken by the parties reflected the average attitude of Belgian citizens towards European integration: support for a Europe-wide answer to the financial and economic crises and measures taken to prevent global warming, the need for a common foreign policy and a social Europe, and opposition to Turkish membership.<sup>7</sup> Membership of the Union has never been doubted. The rise of euro-sceptic discourse did not fundamentally alter that picture. This critical attitude is, however, much more explicit and politicised in Flanders than in francophone Belgium.

Given the large agreement on several issues among many political parties, it is no surprise that the media tended to focus on those items that distinguished them from each other. It goes without saying that this resulted in a rather low level of media coverage in francophone Belgium. Overall, in both parts of the country the European election campaign was overshadowed by concurrent regional elections. Regional issues, candidates etc. received the bulk of media attention.

### **The election campaign**

Almost everything Dutch-speaking and francophone parties did during the election campaign was focussed on the regional elections. European elections receive only one-tenth of the campaign funding. Only two issues generated the parties' concern: who would be the victim of the decrease in seats and who would become the most popular politicians in Flanders and francophone Belgium as far as preferential votes were concerned? Almost all the parties put well-known national figures with European credentials at the top of their lists, with two former prime ministers and a member of the European Commission as the most senior ones. European political parties were totally absent. This is quite remarkable since two of the largest Europarties are chaired by Belgian politicians: former prime minister Wilfried Martens, President of the European People's Party (EPP), and MEP Annemie Neyts, President of the European Liberals (ELDR). The fact that Europarty activities were hardly covered by the press and that no explicit references to the Europarties' manifestos were made (except by the Flemish Socialists) is telling.

De facto, the European campaign only started when Verhofstadt (OpenVLD) entered the scene late April. He had dropped his initial plan of writing a book on European cosmopolitanism but chose the financial crisis instead: "The way out of the crisis. How Europe can save the world".<sup>8</sup> This event attracted a lot of attention and forced the other parties, especially Dehaene (CD&V), to react. The Flemish Socialists found themselves left with a difficult playing field. Unlike in francophone Belgium, it was difficult for parties outside this duel to perform since there were many of them: no less than seven parties had a real chance

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, *Eurobarometer 70. De publieke opinie in de Europese Unie. Najaar 2008*, Nationaal rapport België, February 2009, pp. 116.

<sup>8</sup> G. Verhofstadt, *De weg uit de crisis. Hoe Europa de wereld kan redden*, 2009.

of winning one or more of the thirteen seats in the Flemish district. On the French speaking side of the country there were only four parties competing. The only political heavyweight engaged in the campaign was Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid. As a result, the Socialists and Ecolo mainly articulated criticism of the Commission's performance. In Flanders, most of the incumbent MEPs, especially the 'European experts', stood for re-election, while in francophone Belgium a large turnover could already be witnessed during the campaign. Similarly to the regional elections, opinion polls predicted a loss for the Socialists with the Liberals possibly outnumbering them in francophone Belgium. In Flanders, both the Liberals and the Christian Democrats fought to be the largest party, with the latter predicted to have the highest chances of success. The Socialists were expected to lose the elections.

## Results

On the Dutch-speaking side, the battle of the giants was clearly won by Verhofstadt, who managed to secure a good result for the Flemish Liberals thanks to an unexpected high number of preferential votes. In the regional elections, Open VLD performed a lot less well. The Liberals maintained their three seats in the European Parliament, as many as the Christian-Democrats, who held their position as the largest Flemish party with regard to the vote share received. Former cartel partner N-VA managed to get a seat on its own. This was not seen as a big success since the party did a lot better at the regional level and was perceived to be the true winner of 7 June in Flanders. A party obtaining a better result in Europe than in Flanders was *Groen!*, which managed to secure a single seat. The most significant losers were the Flemish socialists: they lost one of their three seats. *Vlaams Belang* also lost one representative, facing its first clear electoral defeat since its foundation. *Lijst Dedecker* (LDD) won enough votes to send its first representative ever to Brussels and Strasbourg, keeping the total number of seats for Euro-sceptic parties the same as five years ago.

Whereas the Flemish Greens did not manage to surf the green wave successfully, on the French-speaking side *Ecolo* was the biggest winner of the elections. It managed to more than double its previous result and now has two representatives in the European Parliament. Despite a significant blow, the PS continued to be the largest party, with three seats. Its main competitor, the MR, suffered a much smaller defeat but this was sufficient to lose one seat. Commissioner Michel, however, proved to be the most popular candidate as he gained the highest number of preferential votes. cdH could not profit from the losses of the Socialists and the Liberals but kept the status quo with one seat. The seat reserved for the German-speaking Electoral College was – once again – won by the *Christlich Soziale Partei*.

Turnout is not an issue since Belgium is one of the few countries where voting is compulsory. The only post-election question that is able to attract the attention of the media and the wider public is what the three national political heavyweights – Guy Verhofstadt, Jean-Luc Dehaene and Louis Michel – who are now elected to the European Parliament will do. Irrespective of the question of whether they will stay in the Parliament or not, they all expressed their 'availability' to re-enter national politics when they are called upon. In a country with concurrent regional and European elections and a federal level that is still in crisis, this should not come as a big surprise.



**Table 7-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Belgium**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Christian-Democratic and Flemish (D)	CD&V	14.43	3	EPP
Flemish Liberals and Democrats (D)	Open VLD	12.75	3	ALDE
Socialist Party (F)	PS	10.88	3	S&D
Flemish Interest (D)	VB	9.85	2	NA
Reformist Movement (F)	MR	9.74	2	ALDE
Green Party (F)	Ecolo	8.55	2	G/EFA
Socialist Party Distinctive (D)	sp. a	8.21	2	S&D
New-Flemish Alliance (D)	N-VA	6.13	1	EPP
Humanist Centre Democrats (F)	cdH	4.99	1	EPP
Green! (D)	Groen!	4.90	1	G/EFA
List Dedecker (D)	LDD	4.51	1	ECR
National Front (F)	FN	1.26	0	-
Labour party (D)	PvdA	0.61	0	-
Social-Christian Party (G)	CSP	0.19	1	EPP
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>22</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 90.39%; (D) Dutch-speaking electoral college, (F) French-speaking electoral college, (G) German-speaking electoral college;

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; NA: Non-attached; G/EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; NA: Non-attached; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

*Source:* <http://verkiezingen2009.belgium.be>, accessed 15.6.2009.



## 8

## BULGARIA

*Milen Lyubenov*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

On the eve of the European Parliament elections, Bulgaria was governed by a coalition that was quite unpopular with the wider public. This coalition was formed after the general elections in 2005 as a result of a compromise between the former communists of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the liberal National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDSV), headed by the former Bulgarian monarch Simeon Saxe-Koburg-Gotha, and the ethnic Turkish minority party Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS). That grand coalition was formed in order to implement the legislative reforms necessary for the accession of Bulgaria to the EU. Although the coalition succeeded in achieving its main goal – Bulgaria's membership of the EU, at the end of its mandate it had become thoroughly delegitimized in society. The main reasons were the serious problems related to corruption and organized crime in the state, which became the cause of incessant critiques from European institutions. This resulted in a record-breaking number of votes of no confidence initiated by the opposition, which led to no results.

The accumulating lack of confidence in the ruling coalition led to the emergence of a new and a very strong player in the shape of Sofia's Mayor Boyko Borisov,<sup>2</sup> who founded a new political party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). This political party won the first European Parliament elections in Bulgaria held in 2007. To a great extent, the success of GERB was exclusively due to the great popularity of Boyko Borisov, who, with his charisma and populist manner of behaviour, succeeded in attracting a large portion of the initially unpredictable and volatile Bulgarian electorate. GERB gradually became the main opposition against the governing three-party coalition. The reason for this was the weakness of the traditional anti-communist centre-right party, which ruled the country in the years of transition, and which, after a number of splits, had been transformed into a couple of small political parties struggling to pass the four-percent electoral threshold. GERB's membership of the European People's Party (EPP) ensured additional legitimacy of the party as a serious political body.

The participation of the DPS in two consecutive governments – the one headed by Simeon Saxe-Koburg-Gotha (2001-2005) and that of Sergey Stanishev (2005-2009), turned the party into one of patronage and clientelism, and it was accused of corrupt malpractices by many of its high-ranking politicians and activists.<sup>3</sup> This led to the emergence of a populist radical

<sup>1</sup> Milen Lyubenov, The Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

<sup>2</sup> Boyko Borisov is no longer the mayor of Sofia. After the elections held on 5 July 2009, his party GERB won 39.71% of the vote and formed a government of its own under the leadership of Boyko Borisov, who became prime minister.

<sup>3</sup> G. Karasimeonov, *Partijnata sistema v Bălgarija: vtoro preraboteno i dopălneno izdanie*, Sofia, GoreksPres, 2006, pp. 211-14.

right, The National Union Attack (Ataka), which entered the Bulgarian parliament following the elections in 2005. At the European Parliament election in 2007, Ataka won 3 seats.<sup>4</sup>

A significant issue which gave rise to serious political controversy among the parties was the debate over whether the European Parliament elections should be held together with the general election. The opposition insisted that the elections should take place on one and the same date, putting forward the argument of saving funds from the budget because of the economic crisis, as well as of increasing the voter turnout. Both the BSP and the DPS stated that the elections should be held on different dates, in order to give an opportunity to conduct a debate in the country on European issues; however, such a debate never really took place. The parties actually followed strategies aimed at achieving better results. The BSP and the DPS constituted a majority in the Bulgarian parliament and so a decision was taken to hold the elections separately.

### Issues

For many years, Eurobarometer public opinion polls have been indicating Bulgaria as a state whose citizens feel a great deal of confidence in European institutions and the EU in general. The reasons for this are the high expectations that they have of the EU. Society considers EU membership as to a great extent constituting an opportunity for achieving material prosperity and improving economic conditions in Bulgaria. This may seem paradoxical, bearing in mind the fact that Bulgarians are not familiar with the way in which European institutions function, in spite of the expensive informative media campaigns strongly supported both by the state and a wide range of non-governmental organizations. One of the reasons for the lack of knowledge of European institutions and their functions is the fact that political and public debates are thoroughly focused on internal problems. Even in the course of the election campaign for the European Parliament, the debate between the parties was mainly related to internal political issues. Indeed, less than a month after the European Parliament elections, the general election was held. The majority of Bulgarian politicians, as well as the media, generally defined the European Parliament elections as constituting the ‘the first round’ of ‘the more important’ general election.

This peculiarity made the two campaigns difficult to distinguish. As a result, the political debate was predominantly focused on issues related to corruption and the European funds for Bulgaria, which had been withheld as a consequence of innumerable malpractices proven by European institutions. GERB together with the right-wing opposition Blue Coalition, which united the two traditional Bulgarian anti-communist parties, The Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) and Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB), claimed that corruption in Stanishev’s cabinet was the main reason for the withholding of allowances from EU-funds.

A different nuance in terms of political messages relating to the European Parliament elections was put forward by the extreme right-wing party Ataka. The party’s campaign was run under the motto “Against Turkey Joining the EU”. In a series of media broadcasts, the leader of Ataka, Volen Siderov, claimed that Turkey constitutes a threat to the EU as well as to the national sovereignty of Bulgaria. He believed that instead of negotiating for the accession of Turkey to the EU, the cabinet should work in the direction of future integration with Christian countries, such as Ukraine and Belarus. This position held by Ataka gave rise to reactions from other parties. Most were cautious in their viewpoints, arguing that this issue had not been included on the agenda. The DPS also abstained from ultimate judgement. Thus, for instance, in one of the TV debates MEP Filiz Hussmenova (DPS) declared that Turkey was not ready for EU membership at this stage. From her point of view, there was a wide range of troublesome aspects of the country, such as human rights protection. Hussmenova expressed the viewpoint that if Turkey failed to meet the criteria set by the EU, the country would have no chance of becoming a member state of the Union.

<sup>4</sup> After entering the European Parliament, Ataka’s representatives enabled the nationalists there to form their own parliamentary group, called Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty, which, however, was short-lived and was split when the representatives of the Greater Romania Party (PRM) left the faction.

## The election campaign

The pre-election campaign for the European Parliament elections officially started on 7 May, when 14 parties and coalitions wishing to take part in the elections were registered by the Central Election Commission. Both established and popular politicians, as well as experts on EU issues found places on the party lists. Thus, for instance, the BSP list was headed by the foreign minister Ivaylo Kalfin, and that of the Blue Coalition was led by Nadezhda Mihaylova, a former foreign minister in Ivan Kostov's cabinet (1997-2001) and a previous leader of SDS. At the top of NDSV's party list was one of the most popular Bulgarian politicians in recent years – the European Commissioner Meglena Kuneva.

Most of the leading parties used modern forms of political marketing, such as the social networks on the Internet, aiming to attract the younger and better educated voters, although TV broadcasts, posters and billboards remained the most popular means of political propaganda. For example, during the pre-election period, Order Lawfulness and Justice (RZS) primarily used billboards with the caption "Stop Corruption". The number of RZS billboards was reported to be more than 300 nationwide.

The parties used various strategies for their participation in the elections. NDSV relied completely on the personality of Meglena Kuneva, and the whole party campaign was built around her persona. The DPS put the accent on traditional meetings with the electorate in the regions populated with ethnic Turkish minorities. In terms of the forms of political marketing used, the DPS relied on TV adverts and posters, attempting to represent itself as the party capable of defending the Bulgarian national interest in the European Parliament. This was partly due to the aggressive campaign of Ataka, which described the DPS as a "non-Bulgarian party", an instrument of Turkey's national interest in the EU. The rest of the leading parties relied on media campaigns, and there was no lack of black PR aiming at discrediting the image of their political opponents. For example, the BSP used many TV adverts trying to discredit GERB and its leader, Borisov.

During the pre-election campaign, representatives of the European political parties came to Bulgaria to provide support to their Bulgarian counterparts. The EPP representatives patronized GERB, and those of PES supported BSP. The representative of the British Conservatives, Geoffrey Van Orden, supported Order Lawfulness and Justice (RZS) during his visit to Bulgaria, hoping that RZS would become part of the project aiming at forming an independent group of European Conservatives.

Taken as a whole, the campaign was not a very dynamic one and it rather served as preparation for the general election.

## Results

To a great extent, the election results resembled those of 2007, especially as far as which parties succeeded in entering the European Parliament was concerned. Although some political parties feared a low voter turnout, it appeared to be as high as 37.49% – nearly 10% more than in the previous European Parliamentary elections. To a great extent, this result was due to the heightened political confrontation between the governing coalition and the opposition regarding the forthcoming general elections. This is why the parties ultimately aimed to mobilize their core voters, since the European Parliament elections could also have an impact on those that would be held for the election of a national parliament.

The expected winner, GERB, won 5 seats in the European Parliament once again, as it had in the year 2007. This time, however, Boyko Borisov's party won approximately 5 percentage points higher than two years earlier. GERB declared this result constituted the first step towards winning the general election a month later. The Coalition for Bulgaria headed by the BSP gained a result similar to that from the preceding European elections. The Socialists, however, won 1 seat less at these elections in comparison to the previous ones, and their vote was 3 percentage points lower. Nevertheless, the Socialists expressed their satisfaction with the result in general, hoping that it would be repeated at the general election. The DPS succeeded in mobilizing its core ethnic electorate, so that the result they achieved surprised nobody. Over the past

few years, the party had undeniably been transformed into the third political party in terms of electoral success. This is partially due to the generally lower voter turnout, which enabled parties with core electorates, as is the case with the DPS, to achieve a good performance at elections.

**Table 8-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Bulgaria**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	GERB	24.36%	5	EPP
Coalition for Bulgaria (Bulgarian Socialist Party)	KB (BSP)	18.5%	4	S&D
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	DPS	14.14%	3	ALDE
Attack	Ataka	11.96%	2	NA
National Movement for Stability and Progress	NDSV	7.96%	2	ALDE
The Blue coalition	SK	7.95%	1	EPP
Lider	Lider	5.70%	0	-
Order Lawfulness and Justice	RZS	4.67%	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>17</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 37.49%; the mandates for party lists and party coalitions are divided according to the Highest Averages method and Hare quota. The electoral threshold is equal to the national quota, which could be calculated as the sum total of the actual votes given to all the parties and party coalitions divided by the number of European Parliament seats from the Republic of Bulgaria (17) i.e. 5.88%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; NA: Non-attached.

*Source:* Central Election Commission of Bulgaria

A certain outflow of electorate was observed from Ataka, mainly due to the fact that parties such as GERB and RZS use rhetoric similar to that of the party headed by Siderov, at least as far as the DPS and the corruption problems were concerned. In spite of these facts, Ataka assessed its election results positively.

This time, the traditional anticommunist right represented by the Blue Coalition succeeded in winning a place in the European Parliament, unlike the elections held in 2007, when the two leading parties – the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB) – ran separately and were unable to overcome the electoral threshold. Nevertheless, this election result was assessed quite critically in the Blue Coalition because its aim, declared before the election, was to gain 3 seats in the European Parliament. In fact, after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, Bulgaria will have its 18th representative in the European Parliament, who will be from the Blue Coalition.

The greatest surprise in the results related to the NDSV. Public opinion polls conducted a couple of months prior to the campaign were giving the party around 1-2% of the vote, and minimal chances of passing the electoral threshold. However, the party won approximately 8% of the vote and received 2 seats in the European Parliament. This score was generally ascribed to the first candidate on the party list – Meglena Kuneva, whose presence had motivated a wide range of voters to support the NDSV. It is hardly a coincidence that Kuneva gathered the largest portion of the preferential vote in comparison with the candidates from all the

remaining parties – 28.5%.<sup>5</sup> Further evidence of Kuneva's role in the success of NDSV at the European elections was the result achieved at the general elections a month later on 5 July. At that time, the party won only 3% of the vote and failed to enter the Bulgarian Parliament.

Meglana Kuneva decided to keep her position as European Commissioner, and gave her place in the European Parliament to the next candidate on the NDSV list. She cited the political responsibility she had assumed before the European Commission, obliging her to continue working as a European Commissioner, as her main motive for this.

The European Parliament election results had a direct impact on the general elections. A duplication of the general election result with that of the European Parliament election results would mean a very fragmentary parliament, which could result in the formation of a grand coalition once again. The government of the BSP, NDSV and DPS had brought the very understanding of a grand coalition into disrepute among society, since the way in which decisions had been taken there was a result of complex compromises, often hidden and non-transparent to the community. That is why the voters supported the main force of the opposition, GERB, which won the elections and formed a one-party government.

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<sup>5</sup> The voting system for the European Parliament elections allows preferential voting. Voters can mark off one of the candidates on the list. In this way, a candidate who receives a preferential vote equal to 15% of all the votes cast for the party, rises one place higher on the list.





## 9

## CYPRUS

*Christophoros Christophorou*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament were held in a substantially different context to that of the first Euro elections of 2004. In June 2004, Cyprus had just joined the Union as a black sheep following the failure of the referenda on a United Nations plan for the reunification of the island. The election of Demetris Christofias to the Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus in February 2008, succeeding Tassos Papadopoulos, contributed to easing strained relations with Brussels and the resumption of new efforts to reach a solution to the longstanding Cyprus Problem.<sup>2</sup> On the internal front, the tensions and divisions caused in Greek Cypriot politics and party life during and after the referenda have in the meantime lost some of their strength, but their impact was still felt.

Demetris Christofias, the first ever Communist to win the Presidency, did so with the support of his party, the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL – Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζομένου Λαού), of the centre Democratic Party (DIKO – Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα) and the Social democrats of EDEK (Σοσιαλιστικό Κόμμα ΕΔΕΚ). The same three parties had also shared power in the government of Tassos Papadopoulos, but under the presidential system the government could be characterized neither as a coalition government nor as a continuation of the former one. The peculiarities of the situation go beyond that. The main opposition party, the Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός – DISY), while not denying its opposition role, supports the President on his conduct of the talks on the Cyprus Problem with the Turkish Cypriot side. Inversely, the power sharers DIKO and EDEK are almost constantly expressing their disagreements both on the handling of the talks and on crucial aspects of the Problem; they even voted against government draft bills to the House of Representatives. However, neither the fate of partnerships nor the composition of the parliament can affect the power of the President. The President and his government cannot be removed from office before the end of his five-year mandate.

### Issues

The decision of the authorities in 2004 not to sanction those who failed to vote, in spite of the relevant provisions of the law, led to massive abstentionism (27.5%); the pursuance of the same decision in 2009 and the fact that a public holiday (Whit Monday) followed election day increased concerns over even higher abstention rates. Thus, the vote was set for Saturday 6 June in the hope that people would go to the polls before leaving for the long weekend. Along with the above, the limited number of seats for Cyprus (six) and the relatively certain party vote

<sup>1</sup> Christophoros Christophorou, University of Nicosia.

<sup>2</sup> Cyprus has remained divided since 1974 after the coup d'état instigated by the colonels' dictatorship in Athens and the ensuing military invasion of the north by the Turkish Army. The right to vote in the 2004 Euro-elections was exercised almost exclusively by Greek Cypriots; only a few hundred Turkish Cypriots chose to enrol on the electoral lists and vote.

made the results predictable. This reduced public interest in the elections even more. Further to changing the day, a modest media campaign attempted to promote participation. The effort was mostly based on material produced by the European Parliament. The political parties were also mobilised to gain additional votes for their own tickets.

The dominant discourse has for decades been the Cyprus Problem, the division of the island, and the relevant positions of the parties. Unavoidably, this occupied a large part of the elections and dominated over European issues. Greek Cypriots had expected accession to the European Union to be favourable to their views concerning a solution to the Cyprus Problem. The perceived failure of the Union to respond to this expectation when the United Nations proposed its plan in 2004 badly affected its image. However, a reversal has recently occurred, as many have realized that being in the Euro Zone has enabled Cyprus to resist the effects of the economic crisis, even better than many of its partners. However, politicians, the media and people are constantly ready to view Brussels as a friend or a foe based on the perceived (favourable or unfavourable) impact of individual decisions on the Cyprus Problem.

Two parties, the centrist DIKO and the far right European Party (Ευρωπαϊκό Κόμμα – EUROKO) chose the Cyprus Problem as the cornerstone of their electoral programme. They stated their positions on aspects of the Problem and called on voters to make them known to Brussels through their vote. Both parties implied, or even made clear, their disagreements with President Christofias, “who made unacceptable concessions” in the negotiations with the Turkish Cypriot side. EUROKO listed a number of social and economic problems and issues, as well as aspects of the Cyprus Problem, as matters of concern, also affecting the dignity of the people. Its position favoured what it called a European solution – vaguely defined as one based on European principles. In addition to the Cyprus Problem, DIKO also projected a generic slogan asking more for the family, development, the youth and those on low income. Both parties challenged each other and others by either confronting their respective positions or asking them to position themselves on crucial issues.

The Social Democrat EDEK stressed the need to send one of their candidates to occupy a seat in the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, thus strengthening Cyprus in the Union.<sup>3</sup> Their strategic goal was therefore identified in their slogan.

The Ecologists-environmentalists put forward issues related to the environment, as well as the need to apply European standards and principles in a solution to the Cyprus Problem.

The opposition party, DISY, highlighted the benefits of forming strategic alliances, helped by its relations with the European People’s Party (EPP); it made a joint policy statement with the EPP on issues perceived to be of significance for Europe, including further development of the free market and competition, promoting welfare, action over climate change and an enhanced role for the Union on the international scene. The party’s narrow media campaign promoted the idea of a strong Europe with the contribution of Cyprus. In the public debate it challenged AKEL as being Europhobic and undermining the role Cyprus could play in the Union. It also challenged the partners in power for their dissenting positions on crucial issues.

The main axis of AKEL’s campaign was the need to put forward claims and demands as a way to safeguard workers’ and Cyprus’ rights. It also challenged liberal economic policies as causes of the present crisis, and attacked DISY as the force representing these ideas. The party was the only political force that crafted a complete electoral programme on all the basic issues, such as its views on the European Union, labour and social policies, the environment and the Cyprus Issue.

An important issue of contention was that of the participation of Cyprus in the Partnership for Peace. This prompted a vote in the House of Representatives, where all parties except AKEL and the Ecologists voted in favour of Cyprus applying for membership of this organisation. AKEL considered it a NATO instrument of aggression, and President Christofias plainly excluded any prospect of filing a membership application.

<sup>3</sup> EDEK fell short of winning a seat in 2004 by only 37 votes.

Differences in focus and perspectives turned the debate into monologues in the media. There was extensive coverage of activities and reports on the parties' positions. Current affairs television programmes were adjusted to respond to the needs of the campaign, with debates, interviews, analyses of opinion poll results and other.

### **The election campaign**

The political parties invested only limited efforts and funds in the relatively short campaign, which is indicative of the low significance of European elections.<sup>4</sup> Each party entered the race at a different time, with EDEK first in late February. Even this party's one-hundred-day campaign fell short of the usual duration of campaigns for national elections, more than five months. AKEL started in early April and DISY later that month, while the last entrants DIKO campaigned for less than one month.

The parties used all means available to promote their case. To start with, all held extraordinary party congresses, serving two major purposes: congresses attempt to mobilise the party machine while offering candidates an opportunity for publicity. Press conferences, daily statements and various events were also featured in order to attract media attention. Personal contact with the electorate, through visits and public meetings, was also privileged by all. DISY and AKEL had more chances to benefit from such contacts because of their capacity to reach every single community. With respect to paid television advertising, only a fragment of the 100 minutes allocated by law to each party was aired, concentrated in the three weeks before the elections instead of the 40 days allowed. DISY privileged personal contact. However, some late intensive publicity on television appeared to be an effort to catch up, probably as a result of opinion polls.

Individual candidates, except those from AKEL, also ran their own advertising campaigns. In one case, a DISY candidate posted his picture and messages on more billboards than those hired by whole parties. Half of them were ceded to his party to send a different message, both in tone and content: "Shake them up"! In all other cases, each party disseminated identical messages through the different media in its campaign.

To a great extent the selection of candidates followed similar lines: the inclusion of incumbent EP deputies, members of the House of Representatives and party officials. In addition to the above, AKEL included an academic, and DISY a young theologian, while DIKO's ticket was idiosyncratic: due to difficulties in attracting candidacies, it presented one member of the House, one journalist and four relatively unknown cadres. Ten out of the 47 candidates were women (21%), four of them on the Ecologist-Environmentalist ticket.

Given the relative certainty of the outcome in respect of seat distribution, interest in opinion polls focussed simply on who would win more votes, with AKEL and DISY making it their main aim to achieve mobilisation. After leading the race in the opinion polls for months by up to three points, AKEL found itself literally head to head with DISY in late March. It then appeared to trail by less than one point until the last poll, one week before polling day. March was a turning point for all the parties, with AKEL, DISY and EDEK consolidating and increasing their support, while DIKO seemed to stall, losing support.

Three parties referred to their European affiliations as a source of support for Cyprus as well as proof of the work done in favour of the people. In addition, EDEK presented the European Socialist chairman Poul Nyrup Rasmussen in media advertisements asking for support to secure the party a seat in the socialist group; DISY proposed a joint with electoral platform with the EPP; AKEL invited 14 parties from the European left to a meeting in Cyprus in mid-April, which passed a resolution supporting a solution providing, among other things, for the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus. EUROKO 'secured' a similar declaration from the Council of the European Democratic Party (EDP), meeting in Bilbao in May.

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<sup>4</sup> Only DISY, EDEK and the Ecologists disclosed their spending. It is also noteworthy that no special funds were awarded to parties for the European elections, as is the case for national elections.

## Results

Although abstention rates had been expected to be high, the choice of four out of ten (40.6%) voters to stay away from the polls was a major surprise; the increase of 50% compared to 2004 and 300% compared to the 2008 presidential (10.2%) and the 2006 parliamentary (11%, and 8.25% in 2001) elections was beyond expectations. In addition to the factors mentioned in the previous paragraphs, citizens expressed to the media their discontent with party politics, a lack of real dialogue, and even grievances over unsolved problems affecting them. A plausible hypothesis is that the indifference concurred with the decision not to enforce legal sanctions against abstentionists and the apparent lack of impact of abstention on the outcome, i.e. the distribution of seats. All three factors offered many the opportunity to protest at no cost or penalty, either to themselves or the parties. It is expected that in the 2011 parliamentary elections abstentionism will return to its normal rate of 10-12%.

A particularly noteworthy element was the high degree of polarisation indicated by the result, with more than 70% going to the two major parties, and giving DISY (35.65%) a small advantage over AKEL (34.90%). This is the highest ever combined vote the two parties have obtained in either parliamentary or European elections, albeit calculated on a significantly lower participation level. It is also paradoxical that this polarised vote happened at a time when the opposition party DISY was supporting the AKEL President in the handling of the Cyprus Issue. Despite its poor performance in the opinion polls, DIKO's lowest ever share (12.28%) was another surprise. EDEK, the other partner in government, did fairly well with 9.85 percent, one point below its 2004 performance, while the newcomers EUROKO secured 4.12% and the ecologists 1.5%, almost double their 2004 figure.

**Table 9-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Cyprus**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Democratic Rally	DISY	35.65	2	EPP
Progressive Party of the Working People	AKEL	34.90	2	GUE/NGL
Democratic Party	DIKO	12.28	1	NA
Social Democrats EDEK	EDEK	9.85	1	S&D
European Party	EUROKO	4.12	0	-
Ecologists - Environmentalists	Ecologists	1.50	0	-
Others	Others	1.69	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>6</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout: 59.4%; Election Threshold: 1.8%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left; NA: Non-attached; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/cyprus\\_en.html#ancre4](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/cyprus_en.html#ancre4)

The 2009 results appear relatively consistent with those of the 2004 and 2006 parliamentary elections in terms of the order of parties, but not their relative strength or the main features of the election. The conjuncture in 2004 was heavily influenced by ugly divisions related to the referendum; in 2009, DISY enjoyed both the electorate's respect and internal unity, compared to the splits and dissensions and only 28.23% of the vote in 2004; AKEL today enjoys the fruits of power, as against the grievances of both supporters and opponents of the UN Plan that brought its share in 2004 down to 27.89% (34.71% in 2001). Since Papadopoulos lost in 2008, DIKO has shared power but suffered internal divisions. At its best in 2004, it failed to capitalise on the referendum, securing only 17.09%. It is noteworthy that despite a 50% higher abstention rate, DISY won 14,900 more votes, and AKEL 13,700, while DIKO was down by 19,500.

The result was interpreted by DISY as a vote of confidence in responsible opposition policies, severe criticism when needed, and support for the President on the Cyprus Problem; AKEL saw it as a success also reflecting approval of President Christofias' "right and patriotic handling of the Cyprus Problem" and the government's "successful and people-friendly policies". DIKO's debacle provoked many debates both internally and in the media. Its enumeration of 14 factors causing the result nevertheless seemed to fail to identify the real problem: divisions and inconsistency on many issues. All parties expressed their concern about the high abstention rate and vaguely promised to study the issue.

The performances by DISY and AKEL were viewed by some as support for Christofias' line for a solution to the Problem, however the lack of relevance between the type of election and the Cyprus Problem, along with the abstention rate make this argument very weak.

Two of the three MEPs running again, Kasoulides (DISY), who failed in the 2008 presidential elections, and Triantafyllides (AKEL) were re-elected. Matsakis (DIKO), running as an independent having been expelled by his party in 2005, failed.

The result showed that, among other reasons, the 'given' seat distribution turns European elections into an opportunity for massive abstention and the expression of dissatisfaction with party politics and government performance.<sup>5</sup> The performance of the parties proved that DISY and AKEL have largely recovered from the problems caused by their stand in the 2004 referendum. They again showed a high mobilisation capacity and the efficiency of their machinery in securing a high vote share. Support for the President on the Cyprus Issue went along with polarizing rhetoric on other issues, a recipe that worked to their benefit too. EDEK found the means of stabilising its appeal, while DIKO went through a crucial test: the contradiction between sharing power and acting as a major opposition party and a campaign based on the past, the 'no' vote of 2004, failed to convince. Its attempts during the campaign to mask its internal divisions over the line to follow on the Cyprus Issue and the government proved unsuccessful.

With Christofias and AKEL in power, Cyprus returned to its bipolar pattern of politics, with the two major parties playing central roles. The power formation DIKO suffered because of its blurred identity and contradictions that could not compensate for the influence lost with the loss of power.

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<sup>5</sup> In an EP's post electoral survey, released end of July 2009, the two main reasons for abstention quoted by Cypriots were by far "lack of trust in/dissatisfaction with politics in general" (44%) and "the vote has no consequences /does not change anything" (21%), [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/28\\_07/SA\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/28_07/SA_EN.pdf), accessed 8.8.2009.



## 10

## CZECH REPUBLIC

*Anna Kárníková*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The Czech elections to the European Parliament took place during a crisis that had been escalating for more than two years, with the main two parties struggling for a parliamentary majority of the governing coalition. This political situation not only radically changed the political landscape of the Czech Republic but also led to an especially tense campaign.

The tension between the two main political parties, the Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Social Democrats (ČSSD), and their allies on the Czech political scene had been escalating since the general election in 2006. The narrow victory of the Civic Democrats in June 2006 created a political stalemate, which was broken first in January 2007. After nearly eight months of political vacuum, the votes of two 'converted' Social Democrat deputies allowed the creation of a coalition between the ODS, Christian Democrats and Greens based on a fragile majority of 101 out of 200 deputies. While it was tolerated and occasionally supported by opposition deputies, the government managed to push through some crucial but broadly unpopular reforms (healthcare and pension system, tax reform) and resisted altogether four no-confidence votes initiated by the opposition Social Democrats. Negotiations between the governing coalition and opposition over a truce before the start of the Czech EU Presidency failed and the crisis culminated in a successful vote of no confidence against the government in the mid-term of the Czech EU presidency (24 March 2009).<sup>2</sup> The interim government, appointed in May 2009, will lead the country until elections in June 2010.

The elections to the European Parliament were held on June 5 and 6 (Friday and Saturday) in order to encourage both citizens in rural areas and city dwellers leaving for weekends to vote. The whole Czech Republic constitutes one electoral district using the proportional representation system with two preferential votes assigned to each voter, allowing voters to indicate their preference of candidates within one party's candidate list. Compared to the 2004 EP elections, there are now only 22 seats available for Czech representatives. The two years of acrimonious debate had radically changed the political landscape of the Czech Republic: the main features of this period could be described as fragmentation, radicalisation and increased euro-scepticism. The cleavages within the parties led to a significant fragmentation of the traditional euro-optimistic liberal camp as well as of the camp promoting green policies, at the moment represented by three different parties (The Green Party, The Greens and the Democratic Green Party).

<sup>1</sup> Anna Kárníková, Charles University, Prague.

<sup>2</sup> In 2006 the results showed the traditionally balanced position of ODS and ČSSD. The Czech communist party (KSČM) ended up badly weakened compared to the previous elections and only two other parties exceeded the required minimum of 5%: the Christian Democratic Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Green Party (SZ), the latter entering Parliament for the first time. The political party Union of Freedom (US-DEU), which received a rather high percentage of votes in both 1998 and 2002 and participated in the governing coalitions, practically disappeared from the political scene.

As in the last EP elections, there were altogether 33 parties, movements and associations running for the seats in the EP. The parties represented a diverse set of interests, often marginal or civic protest coalitions rather than regular political bodies (e.g. a monarchist party, a poetic party, and associations of freeholders, businessmen and fire-fighters).

The long-running crisis in Czech politics and political culture had also led to a radicalisation of the electorate and the emergence of two extremist right-wing parties: the Workers' Party (DS) and the National Party (NS). An attempt to ban the far-right Workers' Party in March 2009 was rejected by the Supreme Administrative Court for lack of sufficient evidence provided by the Government.<sup>3</sup>

The parliamentary and public debate about the Lisbon Treaty in the last few months had created a decisive moment for the ideational shaping of new parties. Vigorous railing against the Lisbon Treaty seemed to become a central crowd-puller for a wide range of euro-pessimistic parties, from the ultraliberal and only recently established Party of Free Citizens (SSO) and the Czech Libertas party (Libertas.cz), to the ultra right-wing parties, such as the above-mentioned Workers' Party and the National Party (DS, NS).

Czech political debates and the international perception of the Czech EU Presidency were heavily influenced by the public activities of the Czech eurosceptic president Václav Klaus. After giving up his honorary membership of the Civic Democratic Party, which he had helped to establish in the 1990s, he showed his alignment with the Social Democratic Party, which had already twice supported his presidential candidature. His radical position against the current direction of European integration, and in particular the Lisbon Treaty,<sup>4</sup> increasingly triggered a heated debate about the presidential powers anchored in the Czech constitution.

## Issues

In the European media the Czech Republic often seems to have a prominent position in the eurosceptic camp, mostly due to the public activities of its president Václav Klaus. The real picture is, not surprisingly, much more diverse. According to opinion polls, while the strong anti-European movements on the Czech political scene have reduced the percentage of Czechs who perceive Czech EU membership positively,<sup>5</sup> on the other hand especially the young people think of membership of the European Union as beneficial and believe that it will help improve their living conditions in the future.<sup>6</sup>

The Czech Republic also follows a pattern typical of post-communist countries, which might contradict the allegedly eurosceptic nature of Czech citizens: trust in EU institutions is traditionally much higher than trust in domestic ones. In this context, EU accession was perceived as a chance to 'substitute', or at least control, those domestic authorities that do not work properly.<sup>7</sup>

The pervasive conviction among the Czech public is that the Czech Republic as a small and new member state is not respected as an equal partner within the EU.<sup>8</sup> This perception might, however, be challenged by the Czech EU Presidency, which terminated in June 2009 and which brought European issues closer to the Czech door. The presidency stressed the connection between EU and Czech affairs and demonstrated the leadership competences of Czech politicians. Their moves during the presidency were present in the Czech media on an everyday basis and overall the Czech public positively evaluated the Czech presidency.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 'Top court rejects government's petition to ban extremist Workers' Party', 4.3.2009, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/113865>, accessed 17.5.2009.

<sup>4</sup> Václav Klaus refused to sign the Lisbon Treaty after it was approved by both chambers of the Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/cesi-jsou-v-evropske-unii-nespokojeni-dx4-/ln\\_eu.asp?c=A070712\\_103708\\_ln\\_eu\\_hlm](http://www.lidovky.cz/cesi-jsou-v-evropske-unii-nespokojeni-dx4-/ln_eu.asp?c=A070712_103708_ln_eu_hlm), accessed 17.5. 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Survey of GfK Austria: <http://www.euroskop.cz/38/11890/clanek/pruzkum-mladi-cesi-jsou-s-eu-spokojeni/>, accessed 17.5. 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Eurobarometer 2008, <http://www.metro.cz/domov/cesi-jsou-spokojeni-tvrdi-pruzkum-eu-2>, accessed 17.5. 2009

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 'Czechs are satisfied with their EU presidency', <http://www.euractiv.cz/ceske-predsednictvi/clanek/cesi-jsou-s-nasim-predsednictvim-spokojeni-005902>, accessed 17.5. 2009



The leading political parties in the Czech Republic offer a slightly schizophrenic picture of their positions on the euro-perception scale. For both the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats, there is a gulf opening between the party's official position on EU integration and the average mindset of their electorate. In spite of the proactive EU leadership of the Civic Democratic Prime Minister Topolánek, the party remains rather sceptical, calling for a strong reflection on the direction of European integration.<sup>10</sup> Its electorate, mostly young and educated Czechs, however, fully support European integration.<sup>11</sup> The Social Democrats, on the other hand, have always followed pro-European policies while their electorate seems to be rather eurosceptic.

The issues emerging in the campaign were closely bound to the current Czech public debate. The Civic Democrats tried to sell the voters their performance during the Czech EU Presidency and to highlight the lack of constructive steps from the Social Democratic Party, pointing especially to the vote of no confidence initiated by the Social Democrats during the Czech EU Presidency as the most visible example. The Social Democratic Party particularly focused on domestic issues and the economic crisis, while campaigning against the reforms of Topolánek's government and promising security for the future. The pro-turnout campaign for the European Parliament was intensely present in public space (billboards, TV), however the chosen topics, such as consumer protection or environmental issues, did not find much resonance among the Czech public.

The extremist parties (the National Party and the Labour Party) built up their popularity mostly on the issues which were relegated to the margins by the current government and the main parties; their popularity was in the last months catalysed by the economic crisis and corruption scandals of the governing parties. The persisting problems regarding the inclusion of the Czech Roma population, rising unemployment and the blurry boundaries between state officials and business were used as their main programme points. Accordingly, these parties gained their highest votes in regions affected by the economic crisis, or regions where there have been clashes with the Roma community.

### **The election campaign**

The European election campaign worked more as a prelude to the grand finale: the upcoming general elections, which were expected to happen in October 2009, but were later postponed to June 2010. Its results indicated voters' preferences in the transforming political landscape and it also offered an opportunity for the new or smaller parties to gain attention and 'rehearse' their campaign strategies and test their chances of success.

The Civic Democrats' campaign was launched officially in February 2009 and the party allocated altogether 40 million Czech crowns (about 1.5 million euros), as did the rival Social Democratic Party.<sup>12</sup> Parties relied in their campaigns especially on traditional ways of electioneering, such as billboards or meetings in the regions. The TV spots remained marginal. Particularly the Civic Democrats excessively used the new media and communication platforms on the Internet (youtube.com and Facebook) to reach younger voters. The campaign adverts by the two extremist right-wing parties were banned by both Czech public TV and the public broadcasting company for their racist content attacking especially the Czech Roma population. The majority of the parties retained traditional features of their campaigning, relying heavily on leading personalities and catchwords. Like the last general elections, the campaign was quite negative, although the Civic Democrats attempted to define one of their campaign strategies against the negative campaigning of the Social Democrats with the catchphrase "Solutions

<sup>10</sup> ODS party programme, EP elections, available at <http://www.ods.eu/program.html>, accessed 4.6.2009.

<sup>11</sup> Data on perceptions among different groups of voters are available in a study by the Institute of Sociology (Czech Academy of Sciences), in Czech, [http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100683s\\_pm70511.pdf](http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100683s_pm70511.pdf), accessed 30.6. 2009. Another source is an opinion poll conducted by the Social Democratic Party available on their website (in Czech), <http://www.cssd.cz/dokumenty/s7690/a19758.html>, accessed 30.6. 2009

<sup>12</sup> In the general elections of 2006, the two main parties allocated between 80 and 100 million Czech crowns to their campaigns (3 to 3,8 million EUR). <http://volby.finexpert.cz/?q=taxonomy/term/11>, accessed 15.6. 2008

instead of threatening”.<sup>13</sup> We might expect that this approach, which proved efficient in catching attention and obtaining new trust from the voters, will be followed by other parties, and the overall quality level of campaigns could thus rise.

According to the polls, most of the candidates remained unknown to the voters until the elections,<sup>14</sup> which increased the chances of those candidates who had already been working in the EP and other popular personalities running for seats (often from Czech academia). A pointed expression of civic dissatisfaction with the political situation found its embodiment in egg attacks aimed at leaders of the Social Democratic Party.

The Social Democratic Party often demonstrates its embedment in European socialist structures, such as the Party of European Socialists or the Socialist International. ČSSD has often used support from the German Social Democrats (SPD), especially its ex-chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who also supported the ČSSD’s EP campaign this year. Nevertheless, his support did not win much attention, since he only appeared at a rather marginal meeting in one of the Czech regions. The Civic Democrats too tried to take advantage of international experience and support from their international partners such as David Cameron, leader of the British Conservative Party, which then established a new group in the European Parliament jointly with ODS. For their campaign, the ODS also employed PR agencies from the United States<sup>15</sup> and launched the so-called ‘Blue Team’: a team of non-partisan ordinary citizens who volunteered in the Civic Democrat campaign. Together with extensive use of electronic media and new mobilisation strategies, the campaign of the Civic Democratic Party marked an innovative approach to campaigning in the Czech Republic and the results seem to prove its effectiveness.

Although the last polls in May 2009 assigned different outcomes for the main rivals, they identically predicted low chances for the non-parliamentary parties.<sup>16</sup>

## Results

The official election results were announced by the Statistical Office on Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup> and analysts agree that they will mark a further transformation of the Czech political landscape. The Czech Republic scored a rather low turnout compared to the EU average, but a stable one looking back to the EP election in 2004 (28.22% in 2009 and 28.32% in 2004). The results of the elections are summarized in the following table.

Unlike the last EP elections in 2004, there was no sign of a protest vote against the ruling coalition; rather, the ODS managed to use its image as leader of the EU to its advantage. The ODS harvested success from its campaign, which managed to reach and mobilise younger voters. It presented the overall EP election results (low turnout and the loss of traditionally euro-optimistic parties) as a confirmation and further justification of its vision of a new group in the European parliament which bring together ‘Eurorealist’ politicians from the UK (Conservative Party), Poland (PiS) and at least four other European countries to form a centre-right anti-federalist political group.

The result for the Social Democratic Party was a disappointment to its leaders, who expected to win between 8 to 10 seats in the EP. The party attributed this result to the low turnout, which favours disciplined voters, such as those of the Communist party, and the fact that the ČSSD did not mobilise its core electorate for the elections. The Social Democrats are likely to have also harvested voter dissatisfaction with the vote of no confidence, which is believed to have damaged the reputation of the Czech Republic on the international scene. Two moral authorities, ex-president Václav Havel and Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, had expressed their disapproval of the

<sup>13</sup> The Civic Democratic Party developed a two-track campaign; one track was strongly negative under the catchword “Social Democrats against you”.

<sup>14</sup> STEM Agency, <http://www.stem.cz/clanek/1818>, accessed 30.6.2009.

<sup>15</sup> <http://aktualne.centrum.cz/domaci/politika/clanek.phtml?id=637979>, accessed 15.6. 2009.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.patria.cz/Zpravodajstvi/1420004/volebni-preference-do-evropskeho-parlamentu-volit-pujde-40-dotazanych-vede-ods.html>, accessed 5.6. 2009.

“irresponsible” behaviour of the Social Democratic leadership and this might have found some resonance among the Czech public.

**Table 10-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Czech Republic**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Civic Democratic Party	ODS	31.45	9	ECR
Social Democratic Party	ČSSD	22.38	7	S&D
Czech Communist Party	KSČM	14.18	4	GUE/NGL
Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party	KDU-ČSL	7.64	2	EPP
Sovereignty	Suverenita	4.26	0	-
The Green Party	SZ	2.06	0	-
The Associations of Independents and European Democrats	SNK-ED	1.65	0	-
The Independents	NEZ	0.54	0	-
Others		15.84	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>22</b>	-

Notes: Turnout 28.22%.

Abbreviations: ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left; EPP: Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats).

Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/czech\\_republic\\_en.html#ancre4](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/czech_republic_en.html#ancre4)

Both the KSČM and the KDU-ČSL were able to hold their seats in the EP, thanks to their highly disciplined electorates. The result was especially significant for the KDU-ČSL, which had recently gone through an intraparty crisis and elected an experienced party member, Cyril Svoboda, as new leader shortly before the elections. In the second week of June, one of the leading Christian Democratic personalities, Miroslav Kalousek, announced the establishment of a new party called TOP 09, which had already received support from important centre-right politicians, such as the ex-minister of foreign affairs Karel Schwarzenberg.

The green parties (SZ, DSZ, Zelení), the Liberals (SNK-ED, EDS) and the Independents suffered significant losses compared to their results in the 2004 elections and the general elections of 2006, which brought the Green Party to the Parliament. The main problem of these forces was their fragmentation. The leader of the Green Party, Martin Bursík, resigned in reaction to the election result, possibly opening the door to negotiations with the other green parties and leading to a joint candidature in the next elections. If the green parties do not manage to create a joint platform, they will likely disappear from the Czech parliament in the next elections. Similar uncertainty caused the emergence of the new TOP 09, which might weaken the results of the ODS and the KDU-ČSL. The coming months will thus witness a rush to intense negotiations on the Czech political scene.

Although the Sovereignty Party did not exceed the 5% needed to enter the EP, its 4.26% of valid votes make it an important player in the upcoming elections. The party is led by a highly popular TV presenter and politician, Jana Bobošíková, MEP 2004-2009. After the failure of Libertas.cz (0.94% of the vote), which was founded by the TV magnate Vladimír Železný, and other rather euro-sceptic parties, Sovereignty will try to create a euro-sceptical platform under its trademark.

An alarming result with respect to the upcoming general elections was that of the Worker's Party in some of the Czech regions, where it received over 15% of the valid vote. With 1.07% of the votes it is also entitled to receive a state financial contribution to its campaigning costs.

The campaign and the results of the elections to the European Parliament marked a new period in the development of the Czech political scene. The main features of the Czech party system will be decided during the forthcoming negotiations before the elections. There are currently two extreme scenarios on the table: either the small parties will manage to overcome their fragmentation and will enter Parliament, or, slightly more probably, the Czech political scene will lose its smaller parties, including the current coalition partners KDU-ČSL and SZ, which would significantly affect the diversity of the Czech political scene.

## 11

## DENMARK

*Malthe Munkøe*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Since 2001, Denmark has been ruled by a centre-right coalition government made up by the Liberal party (literally, although somewhat misleadingly, called “Left”) (Venstre) and its junior partner, the Conservative People’s Party (det Konservative Folkeparti). The government has been steadfastly backed by the centre-right, Euro-sceptic, Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti). The opposition is mainly represented by the Social Democratic Party. Polls currently predict a close race in the upcoming general election, which is due to be held in November 2011 at the latest.

Although most of the mainstream players in Danish politics favour EU integration in principle, the level of enthusiasm for the EU varies. The Liberal party (Venstre) adopted a more EU-critical position for the 2009 election than had previously been the case; its front candidate Jens Rohde said he saw his role as being the representative of Denmark in the EU, and that he wanted to put up ‘fences’ to restrain the EU’s influence and competencies. The Socialist People’s Party (SF) had gradually adjusted its anti-EU stance to a guardedly pro-EU position, acknowledging the desirability of European cooperation but opposing many of its policies as being too rightist. The Social Democrats, the Liberals and the Conservatives hold pro-EU views, as does the very EU-enthusiastic Social-Liberal Party (Radikale Venstre). The Social Democrats were pro-European, and the Social-Liberal Party extremely so.

Among the Euro-sceptic parties with parliamentary representation, the left-wing Unitary List (Enhedslisten) has traditionally not taken part in European Parliament elections, despite its strong anti-EU position, instead leaving it to the popular movements to voice Euro-sceptic viewpoints, and specifically to the People’s Movement against the EU and the June Movement. The former has had a reputation for being more left-leaning and less principled in its objection to the EU, but nevertheless objecting both to EU policies and its alleged lack of democracy and transparency. Apart from being strongly opposed to European integration, the latter strategically refuses to take any clear political stance in order to draw support across the political landscape. Another strongly Euro-sceptic player, and the only Euro-sceptic party on the right or centre-right, was the Danish People’s Party.

The only newcomer in the 2009 election was the Liberal Alliance. Following a tumultuous period after its formation in 2007, the party had settled on an economically very liberal party manifesto. While supporting the EU in principle, it opposed many of its specific policies, wanting Denmark to stay out of the common currency, and in general calling for a more liberal EU.

### Issues

The Danish population has traditionally been considered one of the more Euro-sceptic in Europe. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty was rejected in a national referendum, leading to

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Denmark opting out of EU cooperation in four areas: the common currency, justice and home affairs, EU citizenship, and foreign and security policy. The Euro-sceptic sentiments in the Danish population were also highlighted in 2000, when a referendum on introducing the euro resulted in a no-vote.

The euroskeptical side also received a boost shortly before the 2009 election, with the controversial *Metock* ruling from the European Court of Justice. The ruling put pressure on the Danish immigration rules, which was a clear indication that immigration policy is also affected by the EU and led many Danes to fear that the Danish immigration regime might be undermined. All the same, Euro-scepticism has been on the wane, and the anti-EU popular movements have seen their support dwindle from 25.5% in the 1994 European Parliament election to 14.3% in 2004.<sup>2</sup> The Danish electorate thus does not appear exceptionally Euro-sceptic in comparison to many other European countries, even if it is considerably less enthusiastic about European integration than some EU member states.

The 2009 European Parliament election was mostly fought on the usual issues, such as consumer protection, workers' rights and animal welfare (with especial criticism of the supposedly cruel long-distance transportation of animals from farms to butcheries), and occasional criticism of the costs associated with the European Parliament having a dual seat in Brussels and Strasbourg. The EU was criticized by Euro-sceptics along these lines for being wasteful, undemocratic and non-transparent.

Environment played a larger role than in previous elections, although the issue was probably somewhat suppressed by the fact that virtually all candidates agreed on the fundamentals of requiring the EU to undertake ambitious projects to combat global warming. The Socialist People's Party and the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) independently suggested an ambitious expansion of high-speed European railway services to reduce the number of flights and hence CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

There was some debate concerning the financial crisis, and calls for tighter regulation of the financial sector, especially from the centre-left parties. The Social Liberal party (*Radikale Venstre*) suggested that Denmark temporarily pay a larger fraction of the EU's budget than usual as a special aid package to the Eastern European countries that had been badly hit by the financial crisis. The party also wanted to build a number of European "super-hospitals" with superior expertise in treating illnesses that require a high level of specialisation. This was met with scepticism from other parties, who were reluctant to back initiatives that might undermine the Danish health sector.

One new issue that entered the 2009 election was the reinstatement or strengthening of national border controls, which had been all but abolished with Denmark's entrance to Schengen. Amidst a growing number of gang-related shoot-outs, presumably over the control of drug markets, the Social Democrats suggested more border controls to curb the illegal trafficking of arms, drugs and women. This was backed by the Danish People's Party, which had previously suggested the same in parliament, but was met with scepticism from other parties who felt the benefits of open borders still outweighed the costs, and that the resources spent on border control could be better used elsewhere. The Liberal Party (*Venstre*) had instead suggested that the EU's outer borders be better controlled to curb illegal transnational activities.

Many parties argued that the election was a contest between the left and the right, rather than between supporting or opposing European integration. The Social Liberal Party (*Radikale Venstre*), however, followed what looked like a strategy to be seen as the champions of unconditional support for European integration, *inter alia* calling for the four Danish opt-outs to be abolished. In principle, only the popular movements and the Danish People's Party are against abolishing them, while the Socialist People's Party favours keeping only the opt-out from the common currency.

<sup>2</sup> Calculations based on former European Parliament election results, available on the homepage of the Ministry of the Interior, <http://www.im.dk/im/site.aspx?p=298>, accessed 2.10.2009.

Media coverage was sparse at the beginning of the campaign, but intensified towards the end. Even though it was still receiving much less media attention than other elections, and many broadcasts did not take place in television prime time, there were many news broadcasts and television debates about the election, at least in the latter part of the campaign.

### **The election campaign**

The 2009 election campaign took off slowly. The first political message to gain substantial media attention came from former Conservative party leader and minister of Economics and Business, Bendt Bendtsen, who suggested that the EU cease its accession talks with Turkey. Despite not being considered exactly a political heavyweight, his name was well-known, which was thought to matter a great deal in an election where most candidates are unknown to the population. After embarking on the campaign, his candidacy had soon become overshadowed by several corruption allegations made against him. While the Conservatives seemed to have hoped to rebound from this string of bad publicity by profiting from questioning Turkish accession, the disappointing Conservative electoral result suggested that they were only partly successful.

The Social Democratic front candidate, Dan Jørgensen, was also criticized, for having used a helicopter to get around for his many Mayday speeches, despite the related CO<sub>2</sub> emission, which did not sit well with his image as a champion of higher environmental standards. As the election drew nearer and the campaign intensified, the picture was still that of a multiplicity of themes and issues.

The use of internet and mobile phone advertising and telecommunication was employed to a larger extent in the 2009 election than had previously been the case. Blogs and facebook were also an integral part of the campaign for many parties, and in the case of parties with fewer resources partly in order to compensate for their inability to buy up extensive newspaper advertisements. In Denmark, television ads by political parties are prohibited, so the internet and newspapers, in addition to direct face-to-face campaigning, are the main avenues for parties to spread their political messages.

All parties, of course, relied to some extent on buying ads in the national newspapers, although apparently less so than in previous elections. The number of expensive advertisements for the Liberal Party clearly showed that its financial muscle could not be matched. The Social Democrats, Socialist People's Party and Danish People's Party spent between 3 and 3.5 million Danish kroner (approximately 400,000 to 475,000 euros) on their campaigns. The two popular anti-EU movements spent around 1 million kroner (130,000 euros) on their campaigns. The Liberal party (Venstre) and the Conservatives spent 7.3 million kroner and 3.8 million kroner (approximately 1 million and 500,000 euros) respectively in the 2004 European Parliament election, but refused to announce the size of their 2009 election campaign budgets.<sup>3</sup> Most parties had spent substantially more in the last general election of 2007. The official reports to parliament, which parties are obliged to provide, indicate that the Liberal Party (Venstre) spent approximately 30 million kroner (4 million euros), the Social Democrats 11 million (1.5 million euros), the Conservative 21 million (3 million euros), the Social-Liberals 3.5 million (475,000 euros), the Socialist People's Party 8 million (approximately 1 million euros), and the Danish People's Party 4 million (540,000 euros) on their general election campaign.<sup>4</sup>

### **Results**

As in other European countries, European Parliament elections do not attract the same attention as municipal and general elections do in Denmark. The 2009 election saw a substantial increase in turnout, up from 47.9% in 2004 to 59.5%.<sup>5</sup> This, however, was with all likelihood mostly due to a national referendum on the law of royal succession being held on the same day.

<sup>3</sup> Figures from Børsen, 20.5.2009, <http://borsen.dk/politik/nyhed/157828/>, accessed 1.10.2009.

<sup>4</sup> The homepage of the Danish parliament, <http://www.ft.dk/default.asp?id=%7B92F1B684-6004-42E7-BD3E-CC2209838A71%7D&px=%7B1175DDD1-AFBC-4456-BB54-E73D3564BA69%7D>.

<sup>5</sup> Folketingets EU-Oplysning (The EU Information Office of the Danish parliament), <http://www.eu-oplysningen.dk>.

Most parties rallied on the election night to proclaim themselves winners. Despite losing one seat, the Social Democrats argued that they should be considered the winners as they were still the largest Danish party in the European Parliament, and noted that it had been impossible from the onset to repeat their impressive 2004 performance, which was mostly due to the former prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen having run in that election. The Conservatives also claimed victory on the grounds that they had increased their vote share from 11.4 to 12.7%. The Liberal Venstre similarly proclaimed themselves winners, as they too had increased their vote share, from 19.3 to 20.2%.

These victory proclamations were met with scepticism from some media commentators and pundits, and in particular many felt that the well-known front candidates, former minister Bendt Bendtsen of the Conservatives, and former party spokesman Jens Rohde of Venstre, had disappointed.

Nobody disputed the victories of the Socialist People's Party and the Danish People's Party in the 2009 election, however. The Socialist People's Party had increased its vote share from 8 to 15.9%, gaining an additional seat and narrowly failing to win a third from the Social Democrats. The Danish People's Party gained 15.3% of the vote, up from 6.8 in the 2004 election. The party thus secured an additional seat and received approximately the same vote share in a European Parliament election as it does in general elections. The Socialist People's Party seemed to have benefited from the immense popularity of its leader, Villy Søvndal, and the Danish People's Party finally managed to gain parity between its general and European Parliament electoral results, perhaps partly as a result of the Metock ruling, mentioned above, which had demonstrated that Danish immigration policy is being affected by the EU. Moreover, since 2004 the Danish People's Party, once frowned upon by many for its outspoken anti-immigration policies, has become much better accepted.

Two parties had no feasible claim to victory. The social-liberal Radikale Venstre lost its seat in the EP, as did the June Movement, whose leader announced on the night of the election that he would request the board to disband the movement. The Social Liberal party appeared to have suffered from a general loss of support in the electorate.<sup>6</sup> The Peoples Movement against the EU fared better, keeping its seat in the EP, but nevertheless not seeming to capitalize much on the demise of the June Movement either. The 2009 election thus saw a continuation of a tendency for the popular movements to lose support. In the 1994 European Parliament election, the popular movements and the two Euro-sceptic parties running, the Progress Party (in many ways the predecessors of the Danish People's Party) and the then fairly Euro-sceptic Socialist People's Party gained 37% of the total vote, whereas the popular movements and the only outright Euro-sceptic party, the Danish People's Party, only gained a total of 25% in 2009.

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<sup>6</sup> This bad fortune was mainly the result of several ill-fated political moves that have unfolded over the last couple of years, the most important ones being the former party leader losing all credibility by putting forward several 'ultimate demands', that its potential government coalition partners could never accept and subsequently having to step down, and the party until recently having declared that it would no longer guarantee that it would support a Social Democratic government, but saying it might also cooperate with centre-right parties, despite most of its voters considering themselves to be on the centre-left and unwilling to see their votes being spent on supporting the centre-right.



**Table 11-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Denmark**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Social Democrats	A	21.5	4	S&D
Liberal party (Venstre)	V	20.2	3	ALDE
Socialist People's Party (SF)	F	15.9	2	Greens/EFA
Danish People's Party	O	15.3	2	EFD
Conservatives	C	12.7	1	EPP
People's Party Against the EU	N	7.2	1	GUE/NGL
Social Liberal Party	B	4.3	0	-
June Movement	J	2.4	0	-
Liberal Alliance	I	0.6	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>13</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 59.5%.

*Abbreviations:* S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; GREENS/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group; EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left.

*Source:* <http://valg.ism.dk/valg/europavalg/Documents/Meddres.pdf> (Ministry of the Interior)



## 12

## FINLAND

Sari Rannanpää<sup>1</sup>**Background**

The Finnish party landscape is dominated by three relatively evenly large parties (the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party, the Social Democratic Party), gaining typically around 20% each in every election since the 1990s.

From the late 1930s until the late 1980s, Finland was generally governed by so-called 'red earth' coalition governments, with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and agrarian centre parties at the heart of the coalitions.<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, Finland had a blue-red<sup>3</sup> and a blue-green<sup>4</sup> government. After eight years of so-called 'rainbow coalition' government,<sup>5</sup> the 'red earth' coalition re-emerged again in 2003.<sup>6</sup>

In the March 2007 general elections, the Centre Party retained its position as the largest party in Finland. The incumbent Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen formed a centre-right coalition including the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party, the Greens and the Swedish People's Party.<sup>7</sup> The Social Democrats dropped to third place for the first time in history. The 2007 elections also saw an increase in the popularity of the populist, national-conservative party, True Finns (PS), which was formed on the ruins of the populist Rural Party.<sup>8</sup>

After the general elections, a party funding scandal involving large anonymous donations, mainly for the Centre Party, emerged. Subsequently the Centre Party popularity decreased in the opinion polls. Support for the National Coalition Party and the True Finns increased. Furthermore, the period of economic prosperity came to an end and income differences in Finland had grown. At the same time, popular approval of the government and the Prime Minister decreased, rising again in late 2008. By May 2009, support for the National Coalition Party, Greens and True Finns had risen in opinion polls, and that of the Centre Party decreased. By the beginning of June 2009, the popularity of the two largest government parties, the Centre

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<sup>2</sup> D. Arter, 'The End of Social Democratic Hegemony? The March 2007 Finnish General Election', *West European Politics*, vol. 30 (5), 2007, pp. 1148-57.

<sup>3</sup> National Coalition Party and Social Democratic Party at its core (1987-1991)

<sup>4</sup> Centre Party and National Coalition Party at its core (1991-1995)

<sup>5</sup> Social Democrat-led majority coalition consisting of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), National Coalition Party (Kok), the Swedish People's Party in Finland (RKP), the Left Coalition (Vas) and the Green League (Vihr). A.-C. Jungar, 'A Case of Surplus Majority Government: The Finnish Rainbow Coalition', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. 25 (1), 2002, pp. 57-83.

<sup>6</sup> The Centre Party (Kesk) became the largest party in Finland and formed a coalition with the Social Democrats (SDP) and the Swedish People's Party (RKP). 'History of Finnish Cabinets', <http://www.valtioneuvo.fi/tietoa-valtioneuvoista/hallitukset/hallitusten-historiaa/en.jsp>, accessed 9.5.2009.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Cabinet in Office', <http://www.valtioneuvo.fi/hallitus/en.jsp>, accessed 9.5.2009.

<sup>8</sup> 'Parliamentary Elections on 18 March 2007', *Election Results*, <http://192.49.229.35/E2007/e/tulospalvelu.html>, accessed 4.5.2009.

Party and the National Coalition Party had decreased. In contrast, support for the Greens had increased.

There are no extreme right-wing parties in Finland. On the left-right axis, the Left Alliance is furthest to the left, followed by the centre-left Greens and the SDP. The Centre Party has clearly moved to the centre-right, closer to the Swedish People's Party<sup>9</sup> and the National Coalition Party, which can be characterised as centre-right.<sup>10</sup> The True Finns' rhetoric is economically leftist, but politically rather nationalist and conservative, opposing immigration and further European integration. The True Finns ride mainly on the popularity of their founder and Chairman, the charismatic Timo Soini.

The Finnish electoral system allows parties and voters' associations to nominate candidates on non-ordered lists. The maximum number of candidates on a list (and on electoral coalition and joint lists) is 20. Candidate selection is decentralised, and the open-list PR electoral system makes voters choose between individual candidates. Pre-voting is possible in all municipalities for approximately one week, and abroad for a shorter period.<sup>11</sup> In the European Parliament elections the whole country is one constituency.

The next general elections are planned for March 2011.

### Issues

The main themes of the campaigns were the financial crisis, a responsible market economy, immigration, the environment and climate change. The National Coalition Party warned against protectionism amidst the economic crisis. The Centre Party and the leftist parties stressed the need for a controlled market economy and the need to close tax havens. Immigration as a positive issue was especially promoted by the Greens and the Swedish People's Party. The need to halt the environmental degradation of the Baltic Sea featured in several of the party manifestos.

A lack of interest in the European elections was widespread in Finland. In April 2009, 48% of the Finns could not name one single MEP candidate, and only 30% said that they would definitely vote in the European elections.<sup>12</sup> Even though the percentage of the population seeing the European Union positively has increased slightly since 2005, negative attitudes towards the EU have risen more in the same period. The most negative towards the EU can be found amongst rural inhabitants, agricultural producers and those with lower education levels. In terms of party politics, the most positive about the European Union are the supporters of the National Coalition Party and the Green Party. The most eurosceptic attitudes can be found amongst the supporters of the True Finns, the Centre Party and the Left Alliance.

The True Finns, together with a number of smaller parties not represented in the Parliament, can be categorised as eurosceptic. The Christian Democrats (KD) and the Left Alliance also have a somewhat, although growing, eurosceptic line. According to the EU Profiler analysis ([www.euprofiler.eu](http://www.euprofiler.eu)), the most pro-European parties in Finland are the Greens, the Coalition Party and the Social Democrats. The Swedish People's Party and the Centre Party are also pro-European, but less so than the previous group.

The number of MEPs elected from Finland had been reduced from 14 to 13, which intensified competition among the parties. In addition, the increased popularity of the True

<sup>9</sup> The Swedish People's Party is a pro-European party that represents the interests of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland (6%). The party stresses the need to maintain the Nordic model of welfare state, but its main philosophy is based on liberalism and individual responsibility.

<sup>10</sup> T. Raunio and M. Wiberg, 'Finland: Polarized Pluralism in the Shadow of a Strong President' in K. Strom, W. C. Müller and T. Bergman (eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, pp. 301-24.

<sup>11</sup> 'European Elections 2009', <http://www.vaalit.fi/15517.htm>, accessed 3.4.2009.

<sup>12</sup> 'Kiinnostus Eurovaaleja Kohtaan Kasvanut', 12.4.2009, [http://yle.fi/uutiset/talous\\_ja\\_politiikka/2009/04/kiinnostus\\_eurovaaleja\\_kohtaan\\_kasvanut\\_676774.html](http://yle.fi/uutiset/talous_ja_politiikka/2009/04/kiinnostus_eurovaaleja_kohtaan_kasvanut_676774.html), accessed 12.4.2009.

Finns caused the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party to fear for the loss of their only seats in the EP.

### The election campaign

All the party campaigns were launched by the first week of May, with the outdoor campaign starting on 20 May.<sup>13</sup> Most of the parties, especially the Coalition Party, and also individual younger candidates from all parties, relied on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other new media in their campaigns.

The Greens used the European Green Party manifesto, the New Green Deal for Europe. The Social Democrats campaigned under the umbrella of the manifesto of the European Socialists (PES), although the party had its own election manifesto as well. Otherwise, the European parties were not visible in the Finnish election campaign. The leader of the PES, Mr Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, visited Finland during the campaign. Mr Jens-Peter Bonde, a leading Eurosceptic, also visited Finland in May.

Candidate nomination closed on 28 April, but the parties nominated candidates gradually throughout the spring. 241 candidates were nominated by the deadline. 11 parties nominated full lists. There was one electoral coalition between the True Finns and the Christian Democrats, as well as one independent candidate.

The Centre Party campaign was based on retro-spirited slogans and posters, turning criticism towards the party into its strengths.<sup>14</sup> The campaign motif was the former party statesman Urho Kekkonen.<sup>15</sup> The main faces of the Coalition Party's cartoon-themed campaign were the most popular figures of the party, who were not even candidates in the elections.<sup>16</sup> The party used internet and new technologies, as well as televised advertisements during the final week, in its campaign. The party slogan was "Enthusiasm, Knowledge and Skill in Europe". According to preliminary estimates, the Coalition Party had the largest campaign budget. The Social Democrats' campaign stressed the need for a social market economy also in Europe. The party slogan for the European elections was "Europe for the People". Eight of the SDP candidates chose to advertise on television.<sup>17</sup>

The campaign of the Greens promoted climate issues, the promotion of democracy and human rights, and tolerance towards immigrants and transparency in politics. The Left Alliance employed anti-capitalist rhetoric in its European election manifesto and applied to people's consciences and integrity with the slogan "Your Conscience is Leftist". The Swedish People's Party's slogan for the European elections was "Diversity Increases Value", referring both to its pro-immigrant attitudes, as well as to the need of the Swedish-speaking minority to pull together for a representative in the European Parliament. The Christian Democrats' campaign focused on their main candidate Sari Essayah. The party campaign for the European elections was a Sin City-themed Eurosceptic one, centring on the slogan "Task in Europe". The True Finns' campaign slogan referred to the party as "the Finnish fire alarm in the European Union". Another slogan often used by the party was "Where there is EU, there is a problem". Its European election manifesto called for a halt in federalist developments and the enlargement of the EU, Finnish self-determination in energy and security policies and the re-nationalisation of agricultural policy.

Of the fourteen MEPs elected in 2004, only eight decided to run in the 2009 elections. The National Coalition Party list included all of the four incumbent MEPs, as well as Ari Vatanen,

<sup>13</sup> 'Eu-Vaalien Ulkomainonta Alkaa', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20.5.2009.

<sup>14</sup> A. Siitonen, 'Flags and Hymns Are Not for Finns: An Evaluation of the European Elections in Finland before the Fact', *Briefing Paper*, 26.5.2009, p. 4, <http://www.upi-fia.fi/fi/publication/76/>, accessed 27.5.2009.

<sup>15</sup> Urho Kekkonen (1900-1986) served as Prime Minister of Finland (1950-1953 and 1954-1956) and President of Finland (1956-1982).

<sup>16</sup> Party Chairman and current Minister of Finance Jyrki Katainen and former MEP and current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Stubb.

<sup>17</sup> 'Demarien Tv-Mainonta Alkaa', *Uutispäivä Demari*, 22.5.2009.

who was elected as MEP from France in 2004. Two of the four incumbent MEPs of the Centre Party ran for office again, as did the one MEP of the Greens. All of the Social Democrats' MEPs were stepping down, as well as the only Left Coalition MEP. The lack of senior figures and MEPs on the party lists was considered to be a disadvantage for these parties.<sup>18</sup> There were 17 current Members of the Finnish Parliament amongst the candidates.

The largest parties nominated nobody from the party leadership. The exiting Chair of the Greens, Tarja Cronberg, who was replaced in May 2009 by Anni Sinnemäki, ran for office. In general, the Green Party was considered to have a strong list, which included a current and a former MEP and several popular MPs. After long-lasting public to-ing and fro-ing about his candidacy, the Chair of the True Finns, Timo Soini, announced that he was standing for the election in March.<sup>19</sup> The Christian Democrats and the Left Alliance nominated their respective Party Secretaries for the election.

As in previous national and European elections, all parties sought celebrity names. Amongst the Finnish MEP candidates, there were Olympic and other athletes, print and television journalists, entertainers and other media personalities. The Social Democrats nominated Father Mitro, a popular and well-known Orthodox priest, as their independent candidate, resulting in the loss of his priesthood.<sup>20</sup>

## Results

The election turnout was 40.3%, which was lower than in the 2004 EP elections (41.1%) but higher than in 1999 (31.4%). The number of advance votes was slightly higher in 2009 than in 2004, 17.6% and 16.2% of eligible voters respectively. As in the 2004 EP elections, the turnout was the highest in the urban southern voting districts (Helsinki and Uusimaa) and lowest in the rural eastern districts (North Karelia and North Savo).<sup>21</sup> Turnout in European Elections is significantly lower than the turnout in national elections. In the 2007 general election the voter turnout was 67.9%. In the presidential elections of 2006 it was above 70% (1st round 73.9%, 2nd round 77.2%).

The results, which were characterised by the plummeting popularity of the Left, brought few surprises. They echoed the local elections of 2008, where the Coalition Party, the Greens and the True Finns increased their vote share, and the Centre Party and the Social Democrats lost supporters. The elections were seen as a victory for the Green Party and the True Finns, who increased their popularity since the previous elections. The losers of the elections were mainly located on the political left. The vote shares of the largest leftist parties, the Social Democrats and the Left Alliance, plunged. However, in comparison with the previous European elections, all three largest parties lost one MEP each.

The National Coalition Party again emerged as the largest party in Finland, as it had done in the local elections of 2008 and the European Parliament elections of 1999 and 2004. The party gained 23.4% of the votes and three MEPs, despite aiming at four seats. All the elected National Coalition Party MEPs were incumbents.

The Centre Party won 19% of the votes and three seats. Its popularity had faltered in the polls, and its vote share dropped by 4.1% in comparison to the 2007 general elections. Two of the incumbent Centre Party MEPs retained their seats. The third new MEP represents a new generation for the Centre Party. Whereas the National Coalition Party MEPs all originate from Southern Finland, the Centre Party MEPs can be seen to have more regional support. Riikka Manner gained almost 20% of the total vote in two eastern voting districts, and Hannu Takkula won some 15% of the total vote in the voting district of Lapland.

<sup>18</sup> Siitonen 2009, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> T. Soini, 'En Lähde Ehdolle Eu-Parlamenttiin', 26.1.2009, <http://timosoini.fi/ploki/>, accessed 27.1.2009.

<sup>20</sup> S. Peltoniemi, 'Mitro Repo Sai Piispoilta Potkut Poliitiikan Vuoksi', *Uutispäivä Demari*, accessed 26.5.2009.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Justice, 'Europarlamenttivaalit 7.6.2009: Äänestysaktiivisuus', 10.6.2009, <http://192.49.229.35/EP2009/s/aaanaktiivisuus/aaanestys1.htm>, accessed 10.6.2009.

**Table 12-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Finland**

Party	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
National Coalition Party	Kok	23.2	3	EPP
Centre Party	Kesk	19.0	3	ALDE
Social Democratic Party	SDP	17.5	2	S&D
Greens	Vihr	12.4	2	G/EFA
True Finns*	PS	9.8	1	EFD
Swedish People's Party	RKP	6.1	1	ALDE
Left Alliance	Vas	5.9	0	-
Christian Democrats*	KD	4.2	1	EPP
Communist Party of Finland	SKP	0.5	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>13</b>	

Notes: Turnout 40.3%.

\* Electoral coalition

Abbreviations: EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group.

Source: Ministry of Justice <http://www.vaalit.fi/14173.htm>

The Social Democrats were hoping to win three seats, but managed to hold on to only two, with 17.5% of the votes. Securing one of those seats was the independent candidate Mitro Repo, who surprised many by gaining more than 70,000 personal votes, becoming the third most popular candidate in the whole country.

The goal of the Greens was to get two MEPs, which they managed by winning 12.4% of the votes. The popularity of the Greens has increased steadily since the mid-1990s, and the party has tended to poll better in the European elections (13.4% in 1999, 10.4% in 2004) than in the national elections (8.8% in 2007). Both of the Green MEPs are long-term party heavyweights.

The electoral alliance of the True Finns and the Christian Democrats paid off: both of the parties gained a representative in the EP. The Christian Democrats did not increase their popularity as such, but their success was brought about by the dramatic rise of the eurosceptic True Finns. Whereas in the 2004 EP elections the True Finns won only 0.5% of the vote, their vote share in the general elections of 2007 was 4.1% and in the 2009 European elections 9.8%. The Chairman of the True Finns, Timo Soini, won the greatest number of personal votes, some 130,000 in total. The Christian Democrats' efforts at focusing on their main candidate worked. Even though the Left Alliance won more votes than the Christian Democrats (5.9% and 4.2% respectively), the Left Alliance lost its one seat in the European Parliament. The loss of its only MEP sparked the resignation of the Left Alliance Chairman.<sup>22</sup> The Swedish People's Party managed to appeal to the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland by stressing the importance of having a representative of their own in Brussels.

The elected Finnish MEPs represent experience. Six of the incumbent MEPs were re-elected, and four other current Members of the Finnish Parliament gained seats in the European Parliament. Two new MEPs, Riikka Manner (Centre Party) and Carl Haglund (Swedish People's Party), represent a new generation in their respective parties. The only so-called celebrity candidate to gain office was Mr Mitro Repo.

<sup>22</sup> A.-L. Sippola, 'Pettynyt Korhonen Eroaa Vasemmistoliiton Johdosta', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 10.6.2009.

Eight women and five men were elected as MEPs. Six of the new thirteen MEPs are from the Helsinki area. The average age of the new MEPs was 47.5 years.

The results can be largely explained by the low voter turnout and developments in Finnish domestic politics. Visibility (both positive and negative) in internet discussion forums and media was also considered important for single candidates' successes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A. Kalliomäki, 'Europarlamenttivaalit Verkossa: Vaikuttaako Kansalaiskeskustelu Vaalitulokseen?', 11.6.2009, [http://www.m-brain.com/files/Europarlamenttivaalit\\_2009.pdf](http://www.m-brain.com/files/Europarlamenttivaalit_2009.pdf), accessed 20.6.2009.



## 13

## FRANCE

*Mathieu Petithomme*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

In 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy clearly won the presidential elections against Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate, with 53% of the vote in the second round. The 2009 EU elections in France were organized six months after the French EU presidency, in a context of economic crisis reinforcing both the activism of the President and the critiques of the opposition towards the government. Since 2007, the UMP Presidential majority has governed comfortably, even though certain critics consider N. Sarkozy a ‘hyper-President’, given the rhythm of public reforms and his presence in the media.<sup>2</sup> While adopting clear right-wing positions on security, justice, immigration and the reform of public services, the President has adopted strategic actions to co-opt prominent figures from the Socialist party (PS) and to try to promote several second-generation migrants to the forefront of the public stage. The activism of the executive is crucial to understanding how parties ran their campaigns, given that all of them criticized the government – from the moderate PS and centre-liberals (Modem) to the new anti-capitalist party (NPA, ex-LCR) and the National Front at the extremes.

The main opposition party, the Socialists, arrived at the elections with an unfinished programme review and severe personal clashes over the leadership and their choice of alliances.<sup>3</sup> After the relative decline of the National Front in 2007 (10.4%), Carl Lang split from the party to create the Parti de la France. Since 2007, most of the ten secondary presidential candidates have been absent from the public scene. Only the centrist François Bayrou (18.6% in 2007) with a highly personalized party profile has tried to embody the role of the ‘most effective opponent’ to Nicolas Sarkozy, a role that the young and dynamic Trotskyite leader Olivier Besancenot (4% in 2007) has also played. Three new coalitions were formed: on the alternative left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s newly formed Parti de gauche competed in alliance with the Communists (PCF), while on the far-right the Movement for France (MPF) of Philippe de Villiers joined the ‘hunters’ represented by the CPNT under the umbrella of Libertas. Finally, under the leadership of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the charismatic May 1968 leader, Europe Ecologie tried to create a pro-European coalition of ecologist movements, going beyond Les Verts, the main Green party in France and attracting important personalities and environmental associations.

### Issues

The 2009 European elections were not a very salient event, with the national media mainly focusing on the government-opposition dynamics. Even though the French rejected the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, the EU integration project remains quite popular. As elsewhere in Europe, national attitudes show a sociological cleavage between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, with

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, European University Institute, Florence.

<sup>2</sup> E. Maigret, *L’Hyperprésident*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> G. Grunberg and A. Bergounioux, *L’ambition et le remords: Les socialistes français et le pouvoir (1905-2005)*, Fayard, Paris, 2005.

pro-Europeans being over-represented amongst the youngest, better educated, urban and tolerant electoral cohorts, and anti-Europeans generally being more conservative, less tolerant and more resistant to immigration.<sup>4</sup> Since 2004, the French debates over Europe have been dominated by the Turkish question and the costs of EU enlargement, for instance through the fear of the 'Polish plumber', in 2005. The main questions influencing popular attitudes are linked with the feeling that France has lost power in Europe, and that economic logic dominates over social logic, leading to a critique of a 'neo-liberal' Europe.<sup>5</sup> National TVs did not so much report on the parties and their programmes, but rather on the organization of the European Parliament and the daily life of the MEPs. The elections brought back traditional left-wing oppositions over key issues.<sup>6</sup> The old debates over the euro were silenced due to the role played by the common currency in the attenuation of the impact of the world crisis. The harsh conflicts which had accompanied the 2004 EU enlargement had disappeared, except for the case of Turkey.

The right-wing UMP defended an intergovernmental Europe inspired by Sarkozy's practice of government, stressing the dynamism of the EU French presidency in the Georgian crisis and the promotion of the G20. The UMP once again used arguments on the fight against illegal immigration and the rejection of Turkish EU membership to mobilize its own electorate, while trying to bridge the gap between nationalists and left-wing liberals under the leitmotiv of a 'Europe which protects' nations and domestic economies from industrial relocation. The government party also realized a major inflection by trying to appropriate environmental issues and asking for a 'carbon tax' at the borders of Europe, presented as a kind of 'community preference'. The anti-government stance taken by the centre-liberal François Bayrou (Modem) led him to criticize the government's decision to bring the country back into NATO, while mainly highlighting national issues and his personal opposition to Nicolas Sarkozy, rather than bringing the traditional pro-EU stance of the liberals to the fore. The PS asked for a social Europe through the introduction of a European minimum wage, a leitmotiv which had not changed since the last 2004 European elections but which had also been promoted by parties of the radical left. With a divided National Council and an initially contested First Secretary (Martine Aubry against Ségolène Royal), the PS struggled to renovate its party programme, adopting by default the platform of the Party of European Socialists (PES), while focusing its strategy on criticizing the government. Both the MPF-CPNT (under the umbrella of Libertas) and the National Front insisted on the defence of the French nation against Brussels' technocracy, the Lisbon Treaty, the cartel of pro-European parties, the 'invasion' of migrants and the prospect of a Muslim-dominated Turkey in Europe.

On the institutional pillar of the EU, the four office-seeking parties, PS, Europe Ecologie, Modem and UMP were all formally in favour of the Lisbon Treaty, while the peripheral parties both on the radical left (NPA, Front de gauche) and the radical right (Libertas, National Front) were against. In contrast to the UMP's intergovernmental Europe, the PS defended a federal and social Europe, while Europe Ecologie constituted the party with the clearest stance in favour of a European federation. On the politics of EU institutions, Daniel Cohn-Bendit's proposal to reject the re-election of José Manuel Barroso created a convergence of discourse between the ex-*Majorité Plurielle* opposition parties (PS, Greens and Front de Gauche). While refraining from enhancing the power of EU institutions or the amount of the EU budget, the UMP argued in favour of a coordination of national reflationary measures and EU economic policies. Europe Ecologie, the PS and the Modem asked for more Keynesian economic policies to fight the world crisis through investments in public infrastructure.

<sup>4</sup> R. Koopmans, 'Who inhabits the European public sphere? Winners and losers, supporters and opponents in Europeanised political debates', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 46, 2007, pp. 183-210; M. Petithomme, *Les européens face au miroir turc. Une analyse comparée des attitudes à l'égard de l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union Européenne*, Institute for Political Studies (MA Thesis), Paris, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> M. Petithomme, H. Caune, A. Lemaire-Dujin, Z. Truchlewski, Les Débats suscités par le Traité Constitutionnel en France: Illustration, Cristallisation et Déplacements des Clivages Traditionnels, *Notes et Études*, vol. 34, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> 'Derrière une campagne atone, deux conceptions de l'Europe s'affrontent', *Le Monde*, 7.6.2009.

### The election campaign

The official election campaign started very late, only two weeks before the vote. Moreover, a recent report estimates that parties used at least three times less funds than in other recent electoral campaigns.<sup>7</sup> While each party list had equal rights to TV broadcasts, only one debate collecting together all the main parties was organized in prime time, three days before the vote. This debate on *France 2* might have further demobilized certain voters because the proliferation of candidates and their equal willingness to talk led to disorganization and an argumentative confrontation between François Bayrou and Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Even though the main parties nominated important figures as heads of their lists in the district of Paris, it was rather secondary party personalities or experts on Europe who were nominated by the four main parties in other districts. The European political parties did not play an important role; the PS, which adopted the party platform of the PES, and the MPF, which joined Libertas, only briefly referred to their transnational connections. Europe Ecologie remained the only party list with a clear European platform and transnational project. The main paradox is that from the beginning the incumbent government majority led the opinion polls in a context which traditionally plays against the incumbent party. The UMP had a high probability of beating its 2004 result (16.6%), while the ability of a divided PS to reach its unprecedented score of 28.9% was clearly under pressure. The third position of outsider should logically have been reserved for François Bayrou, but it became increasingly clear in the course of the campaign that Europe Ecologie was also fighting to attract the vote of a similar electorate, mainly composed of the pro-European middle class and urban professionals.<sup>8</sup>

The election campaign took the form of several tests: a test of the popularity and reform agenda of the government in the context of the world crisis; an examination of Martine Aubry's ability to renovate a troubled Socialist Party; a trial for the Presidential ambitions of François Bayrou after two intermediary electoral defeats in the 2007 legislative and the 2008 municipal elections; and finally, a test for the leaderships of the radical left (NPA or Front de Gauche) and of the radical-right (MPF-CNT or National Front). Given François Bayrou's choice to take the side of the opposition, all the parties campaigned against the record of the UMP majority, a factor which might have indirectly strengthened the incumbent government and contributed to mobilizing its conservative electorate. The European propositions of the PS and the Modem were drowned out by their nationally-oriented campaigns. While initially asking for a 'sanction vote' against Nicolas Sarkozy, Martine Aubry later requested an 'effective vote' to engender a majority change in the European Parliament. It might have been expected that the context of intermediary elections and an important economic recession might have benefited the main opposition party so as to equalize or even overtake the results of the government.

However, the resilience of factionalism and the endless postponing of ideological renovation initiatives soon showed that even the modest objectives of the PS to attain 20% of the vote would prove to be difficult. Europe Ecologie succeeded in unifying the ecologist movements under a common platform, including the Green party (Les Verts), various associations and popular personalities such as the anti-globalization leader José Bové, the environmentalist Nicolas Hulot and the judge Eva Joly. The timing of François Bayrou's campaign initially seemed promising, with the publication of his book *Abus de pouvoir*, which denounced a perceived authoritarian drift of the executive. Presented in part of the media as Sarkozy's emerging opponent, he slowly became the target of joint attacks by the PS, the UMP and Europe Ecologie, creating a common front against his personal presidential ambitions. The TV debate three days before the election might have contributed to shifting the balance towards Europe Ecologie: François Bayrou used a populist argument to criticize Cohn-Bendit, on the grounds of his 1970s libertarian book and its borderline declarations on child sex education, even though the ecologist regretted his statements in 2001. Some commentators even speculated that the prime time broadcast of Yann Arthus-Bertrand's film *Home* two days before the vote, watched by 8 million viewers, might have played a contextual role in favour of ecological and environmental concerns. While

<sup>7</sup> 'Elections européennes. Calculs électoraux...et financiers', *Le Courrier International*, 25.6.2009.

<sup>8</sup> 'Comment les classes moyennes ont lâché le PS pour les écologistes', *Le Monde*, 10.6.2009.

on the radical right, the MPF-CNT and the National Front campaigned in their traditional manner, on the side of the radical left, the popularity of Olivier Besancenot seemed to reach a limit, given the unwillingness of the NPA to enter into a coalition of the alternative left. In contrast, while starting relatively low in the opinion polls (4% in April), the Front de Gauche actively campaigned promoting a 'unitary' leftist rhetoric and benefiting from the charisma of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

## Results

The results of the 2009 European elections gave a victory to the incumbent UMP majority (27.8%) while modifying the political landscape through a clear defeat for the PS (16.48%), an impressive performance by Europe Ecologie (16.28%), and a collapse of the Modem (8.45%). The turnout was the lowest ever for a European election in France, with 59.4% of the voters deciding not to vote, a result induced by the low and late mobilization of national political parties in the campaign, but also by other long-term determinants linked to the nature of EP elections. The election also showed the relative decline of the MPF-CNT (4.8%; 6.7% in 2004), the worst European result for Philippe de Villiers since 1994, and also for the National Front (6.3%; 9.8% in 2004). On the side of the alternative left, the Front de Gauche (6%) won its battle by obtaining four seats, while the NPA (4.9%) remained without representation, even though it did twice as well as under the 2004 LO-LCR coalition (2.5%).

**Table 13-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – France**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Union for a Popular Movement	UMP	27.8	29	EPP
Socialist Party	PS	16.48	14	S&D
Europe Écologie	Europe écologie	16.28	14	G/EFA
Democratic Movement	MoDem	8.4	6	ALDE
National Front	FN	6.3	3	NA
Left Front	FG	6	4	GUE/NGL
New Anticapitalist Party	NPA	4.9	0	-
Libertas	Libertas (MPF-CPNT)	4.6	1	EFD
Independent Ecological Alliance	AEI	3.63	0	-
Arise the Republic	DLR	1.77	0	-
Workers' Struggle	LO	1.2	0	-
Alliance of Overseas Territories	AOM	0.42	1	GUE/NGL
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>72</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 40.63%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; NA: Non-attached; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=11&language=EN#result\\_turnout](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=11&language=EN#result_turnout)

There are several direct consequences of the election. First, it reinforces the popularity of Nicolas Sarkozy and proves the failure of 'antisarkozysme', a personalized pattern of opposition

towards the President since his 2007 election.<sup>9</sup> Not only does the election reinforce the executive and legitimize its pro-active reform agenda, but it also leads the incumbent majority to be more confident about the prospect of the 2010 regional elections. Second, the results show a 'sanction of the sanction vote', because both the PS and the Modem lost their credibility by marginalizing European issues and strongly criticizing the President. With a clear 'European' campaign and discourse, Europe Ecologie successfully attracted part of both the PS and Modem electorate. Third, the leadership of the left by the PS is clearly under pressure, as Europe Ecologie might no longer agree to negotiate as a minority partner, but rather on an equal basis. Paradoxically, the collapse of the Modem might facilitate the choice of alliances for the PS. Yet, given Daniel Cohn-Bendit's unwillingness to become Europe Ecologie's next presidential candidate, the question remains open whether the party will be able to capitalize on its performance to restructure the French political landscape. However, what seems clear is that François Bayrou paid the price of a counterproductive strategy, isolating his party even more and possibly even condemning his 2012 presidential ambitions.

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<sup>9</sup> 'M. Sarkozy sort renforcé par l'échec de l'antisarkozysme', *Le Monde*, 9.6.2009.



## 14

## GERMANY

Sandra Brunsbach, Stefanie John and Annika Werner<sup>1</sup>

### Background

To talk about the background of the election for the European Parliament (EP) in Germany means to talk about an election marathon. In 2009, the most important election is not the European election in June but the general election in September. Even though the political parties did campaign for the European election, major efforts were made to develop the manifestos and campaigns for the national one. Additionally, there were elections for four regional parliaments (*Landtage*) and local elections in eight *Bundesländer*, of which seven elections ran the same day as the EP election. Hence, the European election was a second-order election and was seen as a test for all political parties for the coming general election.

But the major flaw of this test was the low level of interest of the Germans in the EP election: in February 2009, 69% of all Germans did not even know that the European election would take place the same year.<sup>2</sup> Two weeks before the election, only 44% of the eligible voters indicated that they would certainly go to the polls. Besides, many Germans (60%) do not know how the EU functions.<sup>3</sup>

An additional challenge for several parties was the national electoral 5 percent threshold, especially for the Christian Social Union (CSU), which only runs in Bavaria and thus has to mobilize enough supporters in just one *Bundesland*.

Nowadays, six parties make up the political landscape instead of the traditional five parties from the early 1980s until recently: the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party CSU; the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD); the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP); the Green party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) and the Left party (Die Linke). The new socialist party Die Linke entered the political stage in 2007. One consequence is that new paths of coalition building are developing, but *Die Linke* is still not regarded as suitable for coalition building at the federal level, despite taking part in coalitions at the local and regional level in East Germany.

Among the Christian parties, the last weeks before the European election were dominated by several disputes. Seehofer (the CSU party leader and Prime Minister of Bavaria) tried to strengthen his party as the independent political actor representing Bavarian interests. Furthermore, criticism arose over lack of leadership on the part of the CDU party leader and Chancellor Merkel. The social democrats, however, acted more cohesively towards the election than several months before, when discussion about their relationship with Die Linke and their programme guidelines caused trouble and the reorganisation of personnel. Meanwhile, the opposition parties FDP, the Green Party and *Die Linke* struggled to draw attention.

<sup>1</sup> Sandra Brunsbach, Ruhr-Universität Bochum; Stefanie John, Ruhr-Universität Bochum; Annika Werner, University of Potsdam.

<sup>2</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung/ TNS Emnid: Deutsche Bürger vor der Europawahl, survey period: 4./5.2.2009; 1002 respondents in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> Infratest Dimap: Deutschland Trend, survey period: 4./5. 5.2009; 1000 respondents in Germany.

In June 2009, the country had already been governed for four years by a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD led by Angela Merkel (CDU). Many commentators regarded the EP elections as an important test for the national elections in September 2009, and the results proofed them right. The grand coalition was replaced by a liberal-conservative coalition of the CDU/CSU and the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The SPD lost 11.2 percentage points compared to the national election in 2005. The results for CDU/CSU were quite stable.

### Issues

In considering the issues in the European elections, one has to keep in mind their above-mentioned subordinate character. In the debates leading up to the EP elections the most important issues were not the ones referred to in party manifestos, but those connected to the crisis and the issue of potential tax-reductions after the national election in September. In other words, European issues and the European campaign itself only played a minor role in German politics in spring 2009.

In general, all German parties are united in their positive perspective on European integration except the right-wing extremist parties. Common topics were several aspects of the deepening (e.g. social Europe, referenda) and widening (e.g. the accession of Turkey) of the Union.

The themes of the campaigns, however, varied greatly and were not restricted to European issues. The SPD supported the creation of a social union by campaigning for a Europe-wide minimum wage and a general improvement in social justice. Furthermore, the Social Democrats endorsed the extension of renewable energy resources. Against the background of the financial and economic crisis, they reconfirmed their support for stronger market regulation. In their manifesto, the SPD promoted the accession of Turkey and rejected popular referenda on European treaties.

The SPD's coalition partner, the CDU, also favoured stronger regulation of the market based on the traditional idea of the social market economy. In this context, a strong euro was perceived as an important basis for economic growth and prosperity. The CDU's sister party, the CSU, presented itself as the only political force representing Bavarian interests in Brussels and mainly emphasised its differences compared to the CDU. In order to do so, it highly valued large tax reductions, seeing them as a means of supporting the economy in times of crisis. Beside this, the CSU favoured the return of competences from the European level to the member states and, in contrast to the CDU, the approval of treaty revisions via referenda. Unlike the SPD, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) did not support EU membership for Turkey, but favoured a so-called "privileged partnership".

The FDP outlined the classical demands of a liberal-market party, e.g. it supported tax reductions and reduced subsidies. The liberals favoured a strengthened but refocused EU, a cutback in bureaucracy and a downsized European Commission. Turkey should be accepted as a new member when all the criteria for membership are fulfilled. According to the FDP, referenda on important changes in European Treaties should take place in Germany.

The Freie Wähler party – a mainly locally-organized group of rather conservative voters, particularly relevant in Southern Germany – focused on the local effects of European integration. It criticised European bureaucracy and demanded more subsidiarity. Popular referenda should be obligatory for any new European Treaty.

Bündnis90/DieGrünen advocated a reinforced balance between economics and environmental protection. By investing in education, environmental protection and social services, the Greens wanted to generate new jobs. Like the SPD, they supported the introduction of a minimum wage and campaigned against gender-related wage differentials. In contrast to the CDU and CSU, the Greens supported the accession of Turkey to the EU and the introduction of Europe-wide popular referenda on EU Treaties.

Similarly to the SPD and the Greens, the *Die Linke* party campaigned for a Europe-wide minimum wage and favoured an extension of the existing welfare state. A so-called 'millionaire-tax' – taxing high-income earners additionally – was supposed to assure the financing of



additional social benefits. *Die Linke* also argued against gender-related wage differentials. Regarding foreign and security policy, it called for the withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan. It favoured popular referenda on any EU Treaty and the accession of Turkey.

The two right-wing extremist parties, Deutsche Volksunion (DVU) and Republikaner (REP), harshly attacked European integration in their manifestos. They totally rejected the European Union and preferred a so-called 'Europe of Fatherlands', which would not include any supranational structures. Both parties promoted the reintroduction of the Deutsche Mark and vehemently opposed the accession of Turkey.

### The election campaign

The campaigns of the German parties for the European Parliament election were all part and by-product of the campaigns for the general elections in September. Political parties widely used the internet in their campaigns, although to a different degree. They built up special websites for the election, established video channels on YouTube, and presented themselves and their candidates in social networks like Facebook, Flickr, MeinVZ or StudiVZ. Transnational party connections did not play any role in the German election campaigns.

Looking now for the specifics of the political parties' campaigns, the most striking feature of the SPD strategy was the negative campaign on billboards and in most of its TV spots. In the form of cartoons, the CDU, FDP and *Die Linke* were attacked by stating 'dumping wages' would vote for the CDU, '(financial) sharks' for the FDP and 'empty talk' for *Die Linke*. Remarkably, there was no such cartoon against the preferred coalition partner at the federal level, The Greens. The SPD already had some experience with this campaign strategy, e.g. in the general election in 2005, but had previously not used it so prominently. Other than that, the social democrats concentrated on national issues and on presenting their personnel. Martin Schulz, the front-runner for the European election, appeared only marginally in the campaign. In the light of the upcoming general election, the spotlight was mainly on the candidate for Chancellorship, Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

The CDU ran a classical campaign with a mix of personalization and traditional topics. The focus rested on Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was competing for re-election in September. Additionally, Hans-Gert Pöttering, the front-runner for the EP elections, appeared on billboards although he is widely unknown.<sup>4</sup> On its billboards and in its TV spots, the CDU stressed the importance of German interests by highlighting the 'We' in their slogan 'We in Europe' with the German colours.

The CSU campaign was devoted to presenting the party itself as the only true representative of Bavarian interests. The personalisation rested mainly on Horst Seehofer, who is prime minister of Bavaria and not running in the EP election. The TV spot for the European election was centred completely on him, whereas regional candidates and the federal minister for economics, Karl-Theodor von Guttenberg, were presented on billboards in Bavaria. The CSU did not concentrate on the Internet as much as the other parties.

Nearly copying the campaign of 2004, the FDP focused on its front-runner, Dr. Silvana Koch-Mehrin, counting on her physical appeal. Consequentially, the billboards of the FDP centred solely on her portrait and only added a minimum of statements. This strategy of very high personalisation is less comprehensible if one looks at the comparatively elaborate EP election manifesto. It seems that the liberals did not trust their own political arguments or doubted their appeal to the voters.

The campaign of the Freie Wähler party (FW) centred mainly on the front-runner Dr. Gabriele Pauli, who obtained nationwide publicity because of her conflict with Edmund Stoiber in 2006. Pauli was the only person appearing on nationwide billboards and in the TV spot, which were based mostly on European issues. In contrast to other parties, the FW did not have a distinguishable YouTube channel and Pauli was the sole candidate appearing in one electronic social network.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/:stern-Umfrage-Europawahl-Keiner-Spitzenkandidaten/702461.html>.

The Greens were the first to make extensive use of the Internet in the campaign, refurbishing their website into an election campaign platform already in March 2009. Generally, both their billboards and their TV spots were issue oriented. If candidates appeared at all, they were generally Rebecca Harms and Reinhard Bütikofer, the front-runners for EP election. The campaign ran under the slogan ‘WUMS!’ – an acronym consisting of economy, ecology, humane and social and also an echo of ‘BANG’. In contrast to the other parties’ strategies, the Green’s included humorous elements that were perceived as either funny and entertaining or irritating and confusing.

The *Die Linke* campaign concentrated on issues, too. Its TV spots and billboards mainly featured issues not stemming from the EU (e.g. NATO, the ‘millionaire tax’ and education). Only in the last eight seconds of the spot did the front-runner Lothar Bisky call for a change in Europe.

The campaigns of the two right-wing extremist parties were rather similar. The DVU had re-launched its webpage, where it presented itself as the “new right”. Additionally, it established an election platform called “Europe strikes back”,<sup>5</sup> but was only marginally present in social networks and had no YouTube channel. While the DVU billboards mainly presented the front-runner Liane Hesselbarth or some vague statements on its primary issues, the TV spot concentrated on the demand to abolish the European Union. The REP also worked with the internet moderately by re-launching its webpage and using social networks. In its TV spot the party primarily highlighted its demand to abolish the EU, while it concentrated on warning against ‘Islamisation’ and celebrating German culture on its billboards.

In general, the campaigns of all the mainstream German parties were rather similar: they mostly focused on national topics and national politicians. Furthermore, they were relatively small scaled, which is noticeable when one compares the campaign budgets for the EP and general elections: in 2005 the SPD, CDU/CSU, FDP, Die Grünen and PDS (former Die Linke) together spent 61.65 million euros on their general election campaigns.<sup>6</sup> The budget for this year’s EP election amounts to just 23.8 million euros for the SPD, CDU, FDP and Die Linke.<sup>7</sup> The effect of this restricted commitment was highly noticeable, e.g. in the low level of publicity for the front-runners, which varied between 1 and 12%.<sup>8</sup>

## Results

The turnout of the European election clearly gives evidence of its low significance in Germany and its second-order character: just 43.3% of all eligible voters participated and, additionally, a majority (57%) voted on the basis of national politics.<sup>9</sup>

The distribution of the votes between the parties clearly shows the pattern of a six-party system. The CDU was the strongest party at the election, although it lost 5.9% compared to the European election in 2004. Despite minor losses, the CDU’s Bavarian sister party, the CSU, reached its main goal and crossed the nationwide 5 per cent threshold. All the other parties that were struggling with this threshold (e.g. the FW and the extreme right-wing parties DVU and REP) did not even come close to jumping this hurdle.

The SPD gained 20.8% of the vote, thereby undercutting its already disastrous result in the 2004 EP election (21.5%), which at the time was seen as an expression of protest against the government under Chancellor Schröder and its so-called Agenda 2010. Hence, the SPD was not able to regain or mobilize its former voters and had to face an all-time low in European

<sup>5</sup> <http://europa-wehrt-sich.de/>.

<sup>6</sup> J. Tenschler, ‘Professionalisierung nach Wahl. Ein Vergleich der Parteienkampagnen im Rahmen der jüngsten Bundestags- und Europawahlkämpfe in Deutschland’ in F. Brettschneider, O. Niedermayer and B. Weißels (eds.), *Die Bundestagswahl 2005. Analysen des Wahlkampfes und der Wahlergebnisse*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2007, pp. 65-95.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.europawahl-bw.de/2765.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/:stern-Umfrage-Europawahl-Keiner-Spitzenkandidaten/702461.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Newsletter 8.6.2009.

elections for the second time in a row. Its former coalition partner, the Greens, confirmed their electoral strength in European elections with 12.1% of the votes, their best result ever.

Despite the economic crisis it was not the party criticising capitalism and globalisation (Die Linke), but the FDP – a party with a clear liberal economic stance – that enjoyed tremendous support from the voters: the liberals nearly doubled their election result and gained 11% of the votes. They seemed to benefit from the weakness of the Christian parties and were the clear winner of the election. Die Linke, however, only gained 7.5% of the vote. This is even more surprising since it is an all-German socialist party, but won only 1.4% more than its predecessor, the PDS, which was largely regarded as an East-German regional party, in 2004.

**Table 14-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Germany**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Christian Democratic Union	CDU	30.7	34	EPP
Social Democratic Party	SPD	20.8	23	S&D
Alliance 90/ The Greens	Grüne	12.1	14	G/EFA
Free Democratic Party	FDP	11.0	12	ALDE
THE LEFT	DIE LINKE	7.5	8	GUE/NGL
Christian Social Union	CSU	7.2	8	EPP
Free Voters	FW	1.7	0	-
Republicans	REP	1.3	0	-
Animal Welfare Party	Tierschutz	1.1	0	-
Family Party of Germany	Familie	1.0	0	-
Pirate Party	Piraten	0.9	0	-
Pensioners Party Germany	Rentner	0.8	0	-
Ecological Democratic Party	ÖDP	0.5	0	-
German Peoples' Union	DVU	0.4	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>99</b>	

*Notes:* Election Threshold 5%; Turnout 43.3%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/germany\\_en.html#ancre3](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/germany_en.html#ancre3).



## 15

## GREECE

*Sofia Vasilopoulou*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The last general election in Greece took place in October 2009. It was clearly won by the opposition party, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), which returned to power after two terms of a conservative New Democracy (ND) government. The socialists now enjoy an absolute yet somewhat narrow majority of a hundred and sixty seats out of a total of three hundred. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) managed to keep a comparable number of seats that they enjoyed in the previous legislature. The populist far right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), which in 2007 for the first time passed the three per cent electoral threshold and entered Parliament with ten seats, this time increased its seats to fifteen. The Ecologist Greens are the strongest extra-parliamentary party.

The 2007 and 2009 national elections marked the initiation of a degree of party-system fragmentation in a country where the political culture had been predominantly majoritarian since the post-dictatorship transition period of the late 1970s. Although the 2007 legislative gave the victory to the conservative party, it did not enjoy a comfortable majority, having for the first time a political opponent to its right (LAOS). The conservative 2007-2009 government was traumatised and discredited following a series of scandals (concerning Vatopedi and a pension fund among others) and the December 2008 Athens riots. The ongoing 'SIEMENS' case, in which the company is alleged to have paid over 100 million euros to Greek officials to win state contracts, provoked a general feeling that corruption is deeply engrained in Greek society and that no party has the ability or even the will to change the situation. The electorate was disappointed with both the governing conservative party and the political system as a whole. From this point of view, the victory of the socialist party in both the 2009 European Parliament (EP) and national elections can be clearly seen as a sanction vote against the conservatives. The electoral system is a form of reinforced proportional representation favouring the ability of the winner to achieve an absolute majority. A party must receive at least three percent of the vote to be represented in the Greek Parliament. The EP elections are conducted on the basis of party-list single constituency proportional system with a three percent threshold.

### Issues

The Greek public has traditionally been one of the most Europhile in the European Union, although support for membership has slightly declined over the past few years. The EU is thought to provide a stable institutional system through which the country can promote national interests. Being a member of the EU has both modernised and westernised Greece. The European project has been viewed as a solution to many problems of Greek society, including the consolidation of the political system and various fiscal and monetary issues. The perception of the EU, especially among ND, PASOK and SYRIZA voters, is positive. Greece is

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clearly better off inside the EU than outside it, and the EP is highly regarded. Perception of the EU changes radically among voters for KKE, who are mostly Europhobe, feeling that the EU bears some of the responsibility for, among other things, the current financial crisis. For them, the EU is clearly part of the problem, this being defined as the concentration and centralisation of capital at the expense of workers. Voters for the far-right LAOS are disillusioned with the EU because of its alleged inability to contribute to solving major Greek foreign policy issues, including that of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's (FYROM) official name, the situation in northern Cyprus and bilateral relations with Turkey.

The two major parties, ND and PASOK, are in favour of European integration and as such their party programmes on Europe are largely similar. PASOK, in contrast to its Eurosceptic past at the beginning of the 1980s, has become progressively more pro-European than ND, arguing for example in favour of more power to Brussels. ND is comparatively more reserved regarding the relinquishment of individual member states' veto power. SYRIZA, which was a staunch supporter of European integration in the past, has gradually become more doubtful (in relative terms), arguing that the EU has become a neoliberal project not adequately protecting workers' rights. In the run-up to the Parliamentary ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, it campaigned for a referendum. The Ecologist Greens have an environmentalist agenda arguing in favour of a green New Deal but are not yet a fully-fledged party with concrete policies on all issues affecting Greek society. They are strongly Europhile, their position resembling that of PASOK. All these parties agree that the EU should be enlarged to include Turkey.

Strong opposition to the EU has thus far been expressed mostly by KKE, which, in contrast to any other party in Greece, supports Greek withdrawal from the EU. With its hard-line communist ideology, this party views the EU as an epicentre of capitalist monopolies and the exploitation of workers. According to KKE, the EU threatens workers' and trade union rights and is part of a new imperialist order aligned with the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance. LAOS is also sceptical towards the EU; however its position is much less radical than that of KKE. The far right's opposition to the EU has a predominately nationalistic undertone, able to penetrate a historically Europhile yet strongly patriotic population. While not supporting Greek EU withdrawal, LAOS campaigns in favour of a strong position for Greece within the EU from which its foreign policy interests can be successfully promoted, including blocking the future EU entry of Turkey and FYROM. It also seeks to ensure that member states retain their veto power and their national sovereignty.

Although, as shown above, both Europhile and Eurosceptic party agendas clearly existed, the 2009 EP elections in Greece concerned national rather than European issues. Corruption and the economy became the central discussion themes, the issue of the EU itself being largely sidelined. The Greek media showed a keen interest in the elections by prioritising the topic over others during news broadcasting. However, there was a remarkable absence of reference to the parties' EP election programmes and the European Parliament itself. Within the six themes of the televised debate between party leaders, the EU was considered as part of Greek external relations and as such it figured together with the issue of foreign policy. The question addressed to the Prime Minister on this topic did not refer to the EU, but rather focused on whether the governing party had ensured the strength of the Greek bargaining position within the EU. There was no reference to how the EU should work and no debate regarding its future. The EU issue was clearly of very low salience. The debate also failed to provide a platform where party leaders could present their points of disagreement, as the journalists asked each leader different questions on a given theme. As a result, the public could not compare and contrast party positions.

Two important events occurred which dominated the elections. First, a prime suspect in the 'SIEMENS' scandal failed to present himself before a Greek court. Claiming health problems, he stayed in Germany and the Greek police were unable to arrest him. Second, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) report on Greece was released on 26 May, painting a bleak picture of the country's public finances. It strongly encouraged Greece to introduce strict fiscal reforms, including the freezing of salaries in both the public and private sectors in order to avoid entering a long period of recession. In terms of dealing with the issue of corruption, ND and

PASOK chose to blame each other, whereas the small parties criticised the major parties. On the economy, party positions differed. PASOK argued in favour of wealth redistribution. It also supported the use of the money involved in the tax evasion and corruption scandals to pay for education and health. While accepting that some mistakes had been made in running the Greek economy, ND vaguely supported taking new measures to address the current economic crisis and the conclusions of the IMF's report in accordance with social market economic principles. KKE maintained its usual argument that the government should hire all its non-permanent employees, and SYRIZA argued that it would be on the side of workers, young people and the disadvantaged, predicting worse times to come. For LAOS, the main issue on the agenda was immigration.

### **The election campaign**

The Prime Minister officially launched the election campaign on 9 May. Predominantly based on national issues, the campaign had a strong polarising dynamic since the outset. Given the underlying fear of a low turnout, as indicated by various opinion polls and given the fact that the elections were held on a bank holiday weekend, this was a conscious strategy on the part of the two major political forces, and especially PASOK. This strategy had a three-fold objective: to motivate the electorate to vote, to unite parties internally against their political opponents and to mobilise core party supporters. Papandreou, the PASOK leader, argued that the country was in economic, institutional, political and social crisis. His political mantra was 'change' from a conservative to a socialist government. He also argued that the EP elections were linked to national elections and that the Greek electorate should actively penalise the government. PASOK's street posters read "Vote for Europe, decide for Greece". Karamanlis, the ND leader, seemed to foresee that ND would come second, with its core voters disillusioned. As such, his main objective was to decrease the percentage gap between his party and PASOK and to increase the turnout of ND voters. He openly accused Papandreou of being solely interested in gaining power to the detriment of the country's interests. KKE and SYRIZA encouraged voters to cast a protest vote against the governing party and the two-party system. LAOS argued that ND and PASOK lacked concrete programmes. The candidates presented by these parties were mostly previous Members of the European Parliament and established party cadres. First in ND's list was Mrs Giannakou, a former Education Minister. No well-known names figured apart from the actor and script writer Kafetzopoulos. Although he appeared towards the end of the party list, and as such was very unlikely to be elected, he represented the Ecologist Greens on a number of television shows. The European political parties played little role during the campaign apart from their Euromanifestos figuring as weblinks on the PASOK and ND websites, demonstrating that the parties adopted the PES and EPP manifestos respectively as their own.

Televised commercials by PASOK and ND were released on 20 May, nineteen days before polling day. The parties actively sought to arouse the interest of the electorate and motivate them to go to the ballot box. PASOK's strategy was to present the Greek electorate with a series of dilemmas, including "socialism or barbarism" and "we either change or sink", insinuating that PASOK was the only civilised and humane party capable of true change. This intensified the confrontation between ND and PASOK. The conservatives retaliated with a televised spot presenting PASOK in the form of green parrots uttering words including disaster, unemployment and high taxation. The Greek media used these phrases widely in order to attract public attention. One could see the slogan 'parrots or barbarians' in newspaper headlines and televised news captions. Despite all these efforts, however, the public was little mobilised.

At the beginning of the campaign, the opinion polls predicted very low votes for ND and PASOK adding up to less than fifty per cent.<sup>2</sup> The Ecologist Greens would be the main electoral 'surprise' ending up as the third party slightly ahead of KKE. They also predicted LAOS coming sixth in the vote.<sup>3</sup> PASOK and ND picked up towards the end of May with

<sup>2</sup> Public Issue survey 16.5.2009, <http://www.publicissue.gr/1122/euro-barometer-2009-1/>, accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>3</sup> Metron Analysis survey broadcast on television news, ANT1, 16.5.2009.

the Ecologist Greens still running in third position.<sup>4</sup> The exit polls predicted a percentage difference between PASOK and ND of six to seven points, a maximum of six percent for LAOS, a minimum of four percent for the Ecologist Greens and five to six percent for SYRIZA.<sup>5</sup> The results, however, showed both the opinion and exit polls to be largely inaccurate.

## Results

These elections recorded the lowest turnout ever, in a society where voting is compulsory despite the law not being enforced in practice. The level of abstention was 47.37%, 11.52 percentage points higher than the 2004 EP elections.<sup>6</sup> This low turnout can be explained by a general public disillusionment with both the governing party and the political system as a whole. The general impression was that all politicians irrespective of ideological background were corrupt and that the economy was unlikely to recover due to the political dishonesty embedded in the system. The fact that the elections took place on a bank holiday weekend only made matters worse.

The Greek electoral results were the exception to the European rule: the Socialists outperformed the conservatives by four percentage points. However, this significant percentage difference between the two parties did not translate into different numbers of seats: both parties gained eight EP seats. The net loser of the elections was the governing party, which lost three seats compared to the 2004 elections. KKE also lost a seat and SYRIZA fell into fifth position behind the far-right LAOS. Apart from the Socialists, which were the main winners, LAOS almost doubled its vote and gained a second seat in the EP. The Ecologist Greens obtained their first seat ever in an assembly; however, they fell to sixth position from the third originally predicted. The combined percentage obtained by the two main parties fell by ten per cent compared to the 2004 elections, indicating a certain lack of partisan alignment. The public was keen to see fresh politicians governing the country, which explains both the success of the newly-founded Ecologist Greens and LAOS and the relative decline of the established KKE and SYRIZA.

**Table 15-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Greece**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Panhellenic Socialist Movement	PASOK	36.65	8	S&D
New Democracy	ND	32.29	8	EPP
Communist Party of Greece	KKE	8.35	2	GUE/NGL
Popular Orthodox Rally	LAOS	7.15	2	EFD
Coalition of the Radical Left	SYRIZA	4.7	1	GUE/NGL
Ecologist Greens	OP	3.49	1	G/EFA
Panhellenic Macedonian Front	PAMME	1.27	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>22</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 52.61%.

*Abbreviations:* S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); GUE/NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

*Source:* <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=9&language=EN>

The EP elections had become a public referendum against the conservative government. PASOK's EP elections victory brought forward the debate on early national elections, which

<sup>4</sup> Public Issue survey 29 May 2009, <http://www.publicissue.gr/category/pi/varometers/>, accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>5</sup> Metron Analysis comparative table of exit polls, <http://www.metronanalysis.gr/web/html/>.

<sup>6</sup> Greek Ministry of Home Affairs, <http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/e2009/pages/index.html>, accessed 30.6.2009.



the party felt secure of winning, and indeed clearly won in October 2009. LAOS's continuous rise initiated a discussion within ND regarding toughening anti-immigration laws and pushed the government towards adopting policies to promptly manage the issue of illegal immigration in Athens. Some ND Members of Parliament (MP) publically considered the possibility of cooperating with the far right in the run-up to the next legislative elections.<sup>7</sup> One MP even suggested merging ND and LAOS to create a new political party before the national elections.<sup>8</sup> The President of LAOS also invited the then conservative Prime Minister, Mr Karamanlis, to cooperate with his party. Given that the Mr Karamanlis was categorically against any support from LAOS, this provoked diverging views within ND.

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<sup>7</sup> TA NEA online 9.6.2009, <http://www.tanea.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=1&artid=4520933>, accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>8</sup> TA NEA online 14.6.2009, <http://www.tanea.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=1&artid=4521848>, accessed 20.6.2009.



## 16

## HUNGARY

*Agnes Batory*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The 2009 European Parliament elections, the second in Hungary, were held amidst considerable political turbulence.<sup>2</sup> The period of turbulence was ushered in by the last national parliamentary elections held in April 2006, when the two major parties, the Socialists (in government since 2002 with the small liberal Alliance of Free Democrats) and the main opposition party, the conservative Fidesz, turned their campaigns into a competition over who could offer the voters more. Both promised to maintain Hungary's expensive and inefficient welfare system – despite a budget deficit of over 9% which clearly dictated a massive cut in social spending following the elections. The Socialists won, again forming a coalition with their traditional allies, the Free Democrats. In addition to the two coalition parties, the elections returned to Parliament the same parties that had been represented before: Fidesz (on a joint list with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP)) and the small conservative Democratic Forum.

In retrospect, the Socialists won a Pyrrhic victory. Their efforts to cut down the deficit involved many unpopular measures, and already by the summer of 2006 the party paid with a large slump in the polls. Matters only got worse when a May 2006 speech delivered by Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany at a closed-door party meeting leaked in September. For the Left, the speech went down in political history as a rousing call to arms, to face up and stop telling voters only what they wanted to hear. The Right interpreted it as an admission by the PM of having lied to the electorate. A week of demonstrations and violent riots followed.

Arguably, the government never recovered from this double blow. According to Tarki agency polls, the Socialists' popularity went down from a high of 48% (among respondents with party preferences) at the time of the spring 2006 elections to just 22% by the time of the 2009 European elections, with Fidesz in turn gaining ground along the way. An important milestone in this process was a March 2008 referendum, held on the question of whether the small fee the government had introduced for using medical services should be maintained.<sup>3</sup> Predictably, the overwhelming majority of the slightly more than 50% of the voters who participated voted 'No', which Fidesz, having vigorously campaigned for this outcome, interpreted as a resounding endorsement not just of 'free' medical services but also the party's criticism of the government.

The fallout from the referendum in turn prompted the junior coalition partner, the Free Democrats, who had been weary of the economic stabilization package, to quit the government.

<sup>1</sup> Central European University, Budapest.

<sup>2</sup> A slightly longer version of this report was originally published as the European Parties, Elections and Referendums Network's European Election Briefing No. 25; available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epernep2009hungary.pdf> (EPERN, Sussex European Institute). Thanks to EPERN and particularly to Aleks Szczerbiak for permission to use the material here.

<sup>3</sup> The fee was the equivalent of approximately 1 Euro for consulting a General Practitioner.

However, calls for early elections – almost continuous in Hungarian politics since this development – were not heeded. Having apparently concluded that it was in their interest to give the Socialists a chance to recover some of the ground lost to Fidesz, the Free Democrats decided to back the minority government in Parliament, enabling it to stay in office.

As it turned out, there was a major, if admittedly unforeseeable, flaw in the plan: the global economic crisis, which hit Hungary particularly badly to the extent that the government was forced to rely on an IMF-led bailout. For the average citizen, an immediate and hard-hitting consequence of the crisis was a slide of the national currency, the Forint, against foreign currencies, which pushed up monthly payments for Euro and Swiss Franc mortgages and thereby put a severe burden on many households. Rising popular discontent and Fidesz's refusal to engage in a dialogue with the PM on his crisis management proposals finally led to Ferenc Gyurcsany offering his resignation in March 2009. To replace him, the Socialists, in consultation with their erstwhile coalition partner Free Democrats, appointed Gordon Bajnai by means of a constructive vote of no-confidence in April 2009. Mr Bajnai's 'government of experts', as the Socialists referred to the new cabinet (several ministers and the PM were not Socialist Party members) introduced a comprehensive overhaul of the tax and benefits system shortly after entering office.

Fidesz refused to have anything to do with the new measures (or the expert government), and it is not hard to see why: they included a cut in paid parental and sick leave and pensions, an increase in VAT and excise taxes, and the planned introduction of a property tax. Szonda Ipsos polls indicated that only a few weeks after his appointment and a month before the European elections, Bajnai was almost as unpopular as his predecessor, Ferenc Gyurcsany. Hungarians were also extremely pessimistic about their future prospects, and less than happy about the EU. In the last year before accession, more than half of the Eurobarometer respondents in the country thought EU membership would be a good thing. In the autumn of 2008, less than one third expressed a similar opinion, the second smallest proportion in the EU. In the same Eurobarometer survey, the proportion of those saying membership was a bad thing doubled from 2003 to 2008, although the majority thought it was neither good nor bad.

### **The election campaign**

The combination of a massively unpopular government, an economic crisis, and limited popular enthusiasm for European issues presented the main opposition party Fidesz with an excellent opportunity to run a campaign focused almost entirely on the mobilization of discontent. Indeed, the centrepiece of the Fidesz campaign was to turn the vote into a referendum on the government. Fidesz presented the crisis as a direct consequence of the Socialists' incompetence over what they described as seven disastrous years in office. The party's main message, prominently displayed on giant orange and white posters all over the country, was simply "Enough – [Go] vote!" This was reinforced by the suggestion that a decisive Fidesz victory would leave no choice for the government but to resign, allowing Fidesz to gain power at the elections then called and 'undo' the most unpopular measures the Bajnai cabinet had introduced. On the other hand, Fidesz's detailed manifesto, dealing with a wide range of EU policies, received little attention in the campaign.

The Socialists attempted to communicate positive aspects of their last years in office, for instance by running advertisements on projects financed by the Structural Funds, inviting visitors to the party's website to click on a banner "What was built in your district between 2004 and 2009?", and emphasising the gains an average taxpayer would make in 2010 once the new personal income tax system kicked in. In addition to this, largely defensive, stand on domestic issues, the Socialists offered relatively bland messages such as stressing the need to send left wing politicians to the EU.

Despite their 2008 departure from the coalition, the Free Democrats also suffered from the anti-government mood of the times. Having supported the Socialist minority government in parliament, they could not distance themselves from the austerity measures, but neither could they take any credit for whatever achievements the cabinet might have been able to claim. They thus resorted to trying to scare their traditional voters into voting for them by holding up the

spectre of the march of the extreme right. Free Democrat posters showed pictures of ordinary Hungarians side by side with menacing neo-Nazis, inviting people to choose between these alternatives.

As in other recent elections, the core of the Democratic Forum's strategy was to position itself in the centre between Fidesz (portrayed by the party as irresponsible populists) and the Socialists (portrayed as incompetent and weak), particularly by projecting a calm, critical, no-nonsense image of the party leader. In addition, the Forum's leadership decided to make a surprising and risky move: they invited Lajos Bokros, a former minister of finance in a Socialist cabinet who had been in charge of a successful but hard-hitting economic reform package in the 1990s, to lead their European parliamentary list.<sup>4</sup> This controversial move split the Forum's parliamentary group, which was consequently dissolved. Following a very public internal debate about who had the right to expel whom from the party, the Forum's campaign eventually settled on a message focusing on Mr Bokros's proven crisis management expertise.

The other parliamentary parties' MEP candidates were less high profile. The top positions in the lists of the two big parties and the Free Democrats were held by their MEPs (the leader of the Socialist list was a former minister of foreign affairs). While Fidesz leader Viktor Orban and Democratic Forum Ibolya David were very active in their respective parties' campaigns, the PM and members of his cabinet kept a distance – in line with the non-partisan image the 'expert government' sought to project. The transnational party federations were not at all visible in the campaigns, although MEPs seeking re-election made reference to the relevant party group's positions when talking about EU issues. Whatever nuanced differences existed between the parliamentary parties' stances on European integration, they did not leave a mark on the campaigns: as mentioned, Fidesz, which had been the most critical of particular EU policies in the past, particularly around the time of the referendum on joining, was largely silent on Europe.

Apart from the parliamentary parties, four other organisations fielded candidates: the extreme right Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary), the leftist-green "Politics Can Be Different" (PCBD) (running on a joint list with the tiny Humanist Party), the old-style communist Workers Party, and the Romani Unity-Forum of Hungarian Roma Organisations. Apart from Romani Unity, a single-issue party focused on the representation of the Roma minority, all three were Eurosceptic protest parties standing in opposition to the club of parliamentary parties. Among the four, only Jobbik was predicted to pass the electoral threshold. Founded as a party in 2003 by a movement with the same name, Jobbik defined itself, according to its website, as "a principled, conservative and radically patriotic Christian party" which "stands up against the ever more blatant efforts to eradicate the nation as the foundation of human community" and "as the only party to face one of the underlying problems of Hungarian society, the unresolved situation of the ever-growing gypsy population."<sup>5</sup> What made the party's growing popularity particularly worrying for observers in Hungary was its foundation in 2007 of the Hungarian Guard, a now notorious paramilitary organisation.

## Results

The results were in line with what one would expect from second-order elections: at 36%, turnout was much lower than in the previous national election; the governing party and its (former) coalition partner did badly; and most protest parties did well. These results are also in line with some EU-wide patterns in terms of low and declining turnout, a swing to the Right, and the strong performance of populist, extreme right, and/or hard-line Eurosceptic parties.

What may require some explanation is the extent of the Socialist and Free Democrat losses, and Jobbik's gains. The Socialists and Free Democrats received their smallest share of the vote since 1990 (17% and 5%, respectively), while Jobbik's almost 15% was the highest any extreme right (or left) party had achieved in Hungary since 1990. The general swing to the right was also

<sup>4</sup> The second on the Forum's list was George von Habsburg.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.jobbik.com/?page\\_id=2](http://www.jobbik.com/?page_id=2).

very pronounced: Fidesz and Jobbik together secured over 70% of the vote, and Fidesz alone collected more votes (1.6 million; 56%) than all the other parties put together, and over three times as many as the Socialists (0.5 million; 17%), who came in second. Amidst the electoral upheaval, the only stable point was the Democratic Forum doggedly delivering its usual 5%, barely scraping past the electoral threshold for the third time in five years.

**Table 16-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Hungary**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union	Fidesz-KDNP	56.36	14	EPP
Hungarian Socialist Party	MSZP	17.37	4	S&D
Movement for a Better Hungary	Jobbik	14.77	3	NA
Hungarian Democratic Forum	MDF	5.31	1	ECR
Politics Can Be Different - Humanist Party	LMP-HP	2.61	0	-
Alliance of Free Democrats	SZDSZ	2.16	0	-
Hungarian Communist Workers' Party	Munkáspárt	0.96	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>22</b>	

Notes: Turnout 36.31%.

Abbreviations: EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; NA: Non-attached; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=17&language=EN>

The main explanation for the landslide victory of the Right is to be found in the circumstances of the elections, or more precisely the coincidence of two, rather exceptional factors. One is the global economic crisis, and the other the fact that the governing party that was confronted with it had been in office for seven years. The combined effect of these two factors was to magnify the characteristic anti-incumbency bias of second-order elections to extreme proportions – a feature that the Free Democrats, given their 'neither in, nor out of government' status, also suffered from. The major beneficiaries were those parties that harnessed and capitalised on the public's existential anxieties in the wake of the crisis, and seemed to offer appropriate outlets for swing voters to dole out punishment to the 'culprits' in office, successfully portrayed as solely responsible for the hardships.

Nonetheless, Jobbik's 15% of the vote should not be put down simply to the government's unpopularity – the party did well in comparison with the other protest parties as well. It tapped into widespread existential anxieties and prejudices by doing what no mainstream party could (or would want to) do, by putting the blame on minorities and thereby offering the voters easily identifiable scapegoats. Jobbik was also better than any other party at mobilising its core supporters. A Median poll showed the party's base to be both the least supportive of the EU and the most likely to vote: over 70% of them said they were certain to participate.<sup>6</sup> This contrasts strongly with the governing parties' very passive supporters (these parties' supporters were also the most pro-EU, although Fidesz and Democratic Forum voters were not far behind on this score).

As for how much European issues mattered in party choice, the largely domestically oriented campaigns suggest that the answer is: not a great deal. Differences among the mainstream

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.median.hu/kepek/upload/2009-05/Eutagsag.pps#720,14,Slide 14>.

parties were too nuanced. Jobbik and other protest party voters were certainly not put off by their parties' stance on Europe, but sending a signal in domestic politics was probably a more important motivation for choosing them. This conclusion is supported by the fact that voters were badly informed about the European Parliament. In a May 2009 Median poll, only a quarter of respondents could correctly answer a question about how EP groups were constituted (most people thought that MEPs from a single member state constituted a group).

In conclusion, the 2009 elections were in many respects similar to the first European elections held five years previously. Even the active part of the electorate felt that the main purpose of the exercise was to express their dissatisfaction with the government and – in contrast with the 2004 poll – also with the political establishment as a whole. These are the most important consequences for domestic politics: firstly, that the centre of gravity of the electoral spectrum shifted clearly to the Right. At the same time, Jobbik's 15% and the Democratic Forum's 5% is clear evidence that the strategy of trying to unify the entire right-of-centre part of the political spectrum under the Fidesz banner is not feasible.

Secondly, Jobbik's unexpectedly high share of the vote expands the group of parties with national or European parliamentary representation for the first time in over ten years. This may well send a signal to voters who otherwise would be reluctant to risk wasting their ballots by supporting the party, thereby making it more likely that the party will secure representation in the national parliament too.

Thirdly, the liberal pole of the Hungarian electoral field is closer than ever to disappearing. The Free Democrats have used up their electoral capital, and now have to compete with Politics Can Be Different for at least part of their traditional electoral base – in any case a small segment of the electorate. At the same time, the result may have given the party the necessary impetus for a long-overdue internal reform.

Finally, the greatest challenge to the Socialist Party is to reinvent itself while avoiding yet another divisive leadership battle in the wake of this defeat, giving time for the positive impact of some of the current cabinet's recent measures to be felt before the next elections are called.





## 17

## IRELAND

*Conor Little, Maria Laura Sudulich and Matthew Wall*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The Irish party system is largely shaped by two centre-right parties – Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG). FF has been the dominant party in the Irish system for some time: it has been the largest party in every election since 1932, and has only been out of government for two and a half years in the last twenty. In spite of their ideological proximity, FF and FG have never entered coalition government together. Irish governments since 1989 have been coalitions led by either FF or FG, supported by one (or several) smaller parties and, at times, non-party ‘independents’.

The 2007 General Election saw strong performances from both FF and FG, which respectively won 41.6% and 27.3% of the vote. Labour, which made an electoral pact with FG, mirrored its 2002 performance, with approximately 10% of votes. The strong results for FF and FG came at the expense of some of the smaller parties and independents. The Progressive Democrat (PD) party, which had been FF’s coalition partner in the 2002-2007 government, was particularly hard hit, going from eight to two seats. The PDs’ loss of electoral support in the 2007 election led to its eventual dissolution as a political party in November 2008.

The outcome of the post-election coalition negotiations saw the continuation of FF’s role as the major party in government; with the introduction of the Green Party, which won slightly less than 5% of the vote, to a government coalition for the first time. The surplus majority coalition built by FF leader Bertie Ahern was also supported by two representatives of the PDs and several independents. The resignation of Ahern from the office of Prime Minister and as leader of FF due to ongoing concerns about investigations into his financial affairs at a public inquiry on planning corruption (known as the Mahon Tribunal) led to his replacement in those positions by Brian Cowen in May 2008. The next General Election must take place by May 2012 at the latest, though there has been much speculation that it will be held sooner.

The Irish electoral system is a variant of Proportional Representation, employing the Single Transferable Vote method (PR-STV). It is a form of proportional representation whereby voters rank-order candidates, not parties (though the candidates’ partisan affiliations are indicated on the ballot) in terms of preference. In each electoral district (constituency), candidates are required to reach a quota of votes in order to be declared elected. This quota is determined by dividing the number of valid votes by the number of seats available plus one, and adding one vote. In a three seat constituency, for example, the quota would be 1/4 of votes, plus one vote. The process begins with the first preference votes of all candidates being counted. Should one or more candidates exceed the quota at this stage, they are declared elected, and their surplus votes are redistributed (according to the stated second preferences of their supporters). In

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subsequent counts the lowest-ranking candidate is eliminated and her votes are re-distributed among the remaining candidates. This process continues until all of the seats have been filled. Three notable effects of the PR-STV system are a relatively proportional vote-to-seat ratio for parties; candidate-centred and constituency-centric politics; and, quite often, the electoral failure of candidates who do not attract transfers.

For the European elections in 2009, Ireland was divided into four constituencies, corresponding to three geographic regions of the country (East, North-West, and South) and the capital, Dublin. Three seats were to be filled in each constituency. The electoral quota in each constituency was 25% of votes cast, plus one vote. The Dublin constituency was particularly competitive in this campaign, as it had been shorn of one seat, meaning that at least one incumbent had to lose their seat.

### Issues

Irish politics is characterised by a low level of ideological differentiation, especially between the two largest parties. FF and FG trace their lineage to a split in the Irish nationalist movement of the 1920s which precipitated the Irish Civil War (June 1922 – May 1923). In recent times, competition between FF and FG has not centred on ideological debates about the role of the state, tax and spending, or social and moral issues. Rather, it has revolved around their competence and ability to manage the economy in accordance with a broadly centre-right policy outlook.

This lack of differentiation between FF and FG is also evident in their stances on EU-specific issues. Both parties take a broadly pro-integration position, but are opposed to EU intervention in national taxation measures – with Ireland's low corporate tax rate being seen by both parties as a cause of economic growth since the early 1990s. FF and FG are also opposed to any reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that would see less EU funding for Irish agriculture. While FG favours EU integration in foreign and defence policy somewhat more than FF, the large parties' positions on EU policies are otherwise very similar.

FF and FG sit with separate party groupings in the European Parliament. FG has sat with the EPP and its predecessors since 1973; FF has decided that its MEPs will sit in the ALDE group in the 2009-2014 Parliament. The significance of this differentiation is minimal, as is its salience for the Irish electorate. Former Prime Minister Bertie Ahern memorably downplayed the importance of European Parliament party groups when facing domestic criticism over FF's membership of its (then) party group, the UEN, describing it as a 'technical arrangement' to facilitate MEPs in their work.

There has been some discussion of the need to enhance the social aspect of the EU (in terms of levels of rights and protections afforded to citizens and workers in Member States) by Ireland's smaller, broadly left-oriented parties (the Labour Party, the Socialist Party, the Greens, and Sinn Féin). With regard to EU foreign and defence policy, these parties remain opposed to any measures that would lead to any diminution of Ireland's position of military neutrality.

The election campaign was notably devoid of meaningful debate on the role and nature of the EU. The Irish political and media agenda, in the run-up to the European election, was generally defined by national issues, with EU policy remaining a marginal concern and the vast majority of the public having little or no interest in the EU party group system or how the Irish parties fit into that system.

The major European issue to have penetrated mainstream debate in Irish politics concerns the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Due to a 1987 Supreme Court ruling, Ireland cannot ratify an EU reform treaty unless that treaty has been approved in a referendum. In June 2008, Ireland held a referendum on the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. The three largest political parties – FF, FG, Labour – campaigned in favour of a 'Yes' vote. The Green Party's leadership also supported the Treaty, but narrowly failed to convince the party members (by the two-thirds majority required by party rules) to allow the party, as such, to campaign on the referendum. Despite its support from the major parties, the Treaty was rejected by a margin of 53.4% to 46.6%; of Ireland's 43 national parliamentary electoral constituencies, only 10 voted in favour.

The Lisbon Treaty referendum campaign was also notable for the emergence of Libertas – an organisation led by Declan Ganley – which conducted a vigorous ‘No’ campaign; and which later presented candidates for the European Parliament elections in 14 Member States, including three candidates in Ireland. The Socialist Party and Sinn Féin also opposed the Treaty and look set to oppose any future attempts to ratify it. The Green Party will again put the question to a vote of its members in advance of the next referendum campaign. The major parties continue to support the Treaty, resulting in a lack of mainstream inter-party debate on the issue.

The Government has signalled its intention to hold a second referendum in Autumn 2009, following the conclusion of negotiations on certain aspects of the Treaty (most notably the revised agreement that each state will have one Commissioner), and the provision of legal assurances relating to neutrality, taxation and abortion. Opinion polls taken ahead of the European elections revealed a strong swing towards the ‘Yes’ camp. Some commentators suggested that this resulted from the sense of insecurity arising from Ireland’s emerging economic problems.<sup>2</sup>

At the national level, the economic effects of the global financial crisis were exacerbated by the collapse of Irish property values, leading to a dramatic decline in construction activity and in tax revenues. Defaults on loans to Irish banks by numerous property developers led to a collapse in the value of those banks’ shares and to government intervention to keep the banks solvent. As the banking crisis unfolded, there were revelations of questionable practices in the sector, most notably at Anglo-Irish bank (which has now been nationalised). The Government was forced to implement an emergency ‘mini-Budget’ in April 2009, raising tax and cutting spending in order to make up for the shortfall in revenues resulting from the sharp decline in economic activity.

In this context, economic considerations understandably dominated the election campaign. Much of the political discourse concerned the proper locus of fault for the economic crisis. Given the extent to which FF dominated government since the mid-1980s – and especially since 1997 – it is perhaps unsurprising that it was widely perceived to be responsible for at least some elements of the economic crisis. Some debates were more forward-looking, with parties discussing the proper solution to the banking crisis (whether it should involve nationalisation, the extent of risk that should be borne by bank bond-holders etc.). There was also some discussion of public sector reform, though parties’ positions on this issue remained vague.

### **The election campaign**

The official campaign for the European election of 2009 ran from 29 April to 5 June 2009. It came during a time of considerable turbulence in the Irish political system. FF had witnessed a dramatic collapse in their support in the wake of economic difficulties, including rapidly-growing unemployment from the last quarter of 2008 onwards. Polls during the campaign placed FF as the third-largest party in the Irish political system, at approximately 20%. This figure represented less than half of the 41.6% of votes that FF received in the 2007 General Election. The primary beneficiaries of this collapse, in terms of stated voting intentions in public opinion polls, were FG and Labour, which saw their support jump to 36% and 23% respectively.

There was a strong sense of second-order sentiment surrounding the election campaign arising from the banking, fiscal and employment crises. Due to the high levels of dissatisfaction with the Government, the European elections were widely perceived as a referendum on the incumbent coalition, rather than an expression of popular preferences on European political issues. For example, Joe Higgins, a former MP and the Socialist Party candidate in the Dublin constituency, called on voters to ‘punish Fianna Fáil and the Greens’ in his campaign literature.

The 2009 European Parliament elections coincided with nationwide local council elections and two by-elections for parliamentary seats in the Dublin Central and Dublin South

<sup>2</sup> Irish voters approved the Treaty of Lisbon in a second referendum with 67.1% in favour.

constituencies. This confluence of elections led to a multi-level campaign; and the European Parliament elections were, at times, overshadowed by developments at other levels. Incumbents and other candidates tended to stress their suitability for ensuring that Ireland gets a share of the resources allocated at the European level. The role and nature of European political groupings were generally not given prominence by candidates, with several candidates actively emphasizing that they were free to vote in Ireland's interests whenever those interests clashed with the position of their party group.

In terms of media coverage, Irish campaign restrictions mean that candidates cannot purchase advertisements on the radio or television. Instead, candidates' exposure in these media typically comes from their participation in a number of set-piece debates hosted by TV and radio stations during the campaign. The most prominent and visible expression of Irish political campaigns comes in the form of posters and leaflets, with a political culture and electoral system that puts a premium on personalized campaigning and tends to reward personal contact between candidates and voters, including door-to-door canvassing.

## Results

Despite losing one seat, FG outperformed FF both in terms of votes and seats. FG won four seats; Labour and FF each won three; the Socialist Party won one seat; and an independent MEP retained her seat. FF and the Green Party were heavily defeated in the European elections, in the local elections and in the two Dublin byelections. Turnout for the European Parliament election was high, at 57.6% – well above the EU average of 43.2% – though it varied between constituencies (Dublin 50.8%; East 56.8%; South 59.2%; North-West 63.4%).

The poll-topping candidates in each of the four constituencies were sitting MEPs: Marian Harkin (Independent, North-West); Brian Crowley (FF, South); Gay Mitchell (FG, Dublin); and Mairead McGuinness (FG, East). However, of the thirteen sitting MEPs, six did not retain their seats. One FF MEP, Seán Ó'Neachtain, pulled out of the contest shortly before the campaign for health reasons; the other five lost their seats in electoral competition. Only one of these losses was inevitable, following from the Dublin constituency's reduced representation in the 2009-2014 Parliament.

Party colleagues effectively took the places of some incumbents: (now-former) junior minister Pat 'The Cope' Gallagher (FF) replaced Seán Ó'Neachtain in North-West; and Seán Kelly (FG) displaced Colm Burke in South. While Sinn Féin topped the poll in Northern Ireland for the first time (see chapter on the United Kingdom), it lost its only MEP in the Republic (Mary-Lou McDonald, Dublin). There were important breakthroughs for the Labour Party, as Nessa Childers (East) and Alan Kelly (South) won seats in the European Parliament for the first time; and for the Socialist Party, as former MP Joe Higgins became that party's first ever MEP, representing Dublin.

Of the twelve candidates elected, only one (Mairead McGuinness, FG, East) exceeded the electoral quota with first preference votes, and transfers from eliminated candidates proved decisive in many instances. Despite Libertas' strong showing in one constituency (North-West, where Declan Ganley received 54.62% of a quota in first preference votes), his failure to attract transfers – consistent with Libertas' negative campaigning strategy towards a wide range of candidates and parties – meant that he did not win a seat. Also notable was FG's failure to retain two seats in East, despite attracting over 40% of the vote, prompting criticism of McGuinness's tactics and the party's vote-management strategy.

Almost all of the immediate post-election media focus was on the implications of the results for national, rather than European, politics. Following the departure of Pat 'The Cope' Gallagher from the national parliament to the European Parliament, and the victory of Fine Gael and an independent candidate in the Dublin South and Dublin Central byelections, the coalition of Fianna Fáil (75 seats), the Green Party (6) and independent MPs (4) has a majority of six seats in the lower house of parliament. The elections confirmed that the coalition parties were in an extremely difficult position, with both likely to encounter electoral devastation were they to face a general election.

Declan Ganley's failure to be elected carried implications for the campaign on the second Lisbon Treaty referendum. During the European election campaign, he pledged not to play a role in that referendum campaign if he was not elected; after his defeat, he confirmed this. While Joe Higgins' victory in Dublin will give impetus to the 'left' wing of the anti-Lisbon campaign – which may be further bolstered by the continued deterioration of economic conditions – Sinn Féin's loss of its only MEP in the Republic and the defeat of anti-Treaty incumbent Kathy Sinnott (South) may cost the 'No' campaign votes. An exit poll conducted during the elections on 5 June confirmed that sentiment towards the Treaty has become more favourable: 54% of voters said that they would vote in favour and 28% against, with 18% undecided.

**Table 17-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Ireland**

Party	Abbr.	Votes (% first preference)	MEPs	Political Group
Fine Gael	FF	29.13	4	EPP
Fianna Fáil	FG	24.08	3	ALDE
Labour Party	Lab	13.92	3	S&D
Sinn Féin	SF	11.10	0	-
M. Harkin (Ind)	M. Harkin (Ind)	4.63	1	ALDE
Socialist Party	Soc	2.76	1	GUE/NGL
Others		14.24	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>12</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 58.64%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP : Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ALDE : Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; S&D : Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; GUE/ NGL : Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/ireland\\_en.html#ancre3](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/ireland_en.html#ancre3)



## 18

## ITALY

*Edoardo Bressanelli, Andrea Calderaro, Daniela Piccio and Furio Stamati*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Italy took part in the European Parliament (EP) elections one year after the national general election of April 2008. National elections had on that occasion been brought forward due to the parliamentary crisis which led to the resignation of the Prime Minister Prodi, former leader of the centre-left coalition. He also retired from politics.

The new national elections brought back to power the centre-right coalition House of Freedom (Casa della Libertà), led by Berlusconi. The governing coalition included the regionalist party Northern League (LN), and the People of Freedom (PDL), formed from a merger between Forza Italia (Go Italy) and National Alliance (AN). Unlike the previous Berlusconi government, it did not include the medium-sized Christian-Democratic party Union of the Centre (UDC), which decided to contest the elections alone. In contrast, the left was highly fragmented: the moderates (including the biggest opposition party, the Democratic Party, PD) and the more radical parties decided not to establish any tactical alliance, duly opposing each other during the electoral campaign.

This fragmentation strongly penalized the radical Left: because of the electoral threshold only a small number of parties achieved parliamentary representation. In order to further reduce party system fragmentation, a four-percent threshold was then introduced for the EP elections, replacing the previous proportional formula which granted a seat to parties with a mere 0.7 percent of the votes. Hence, in the 2009 EP elections big and medium-sized parties ran independently, while the 'dwarves',<sup>2</sup> both on the left and on the right, were pushed to form alliances. Notably, the 2009 elections were the first for the PDL and for the new secretary of the PD, Franceschini.

### Issues

The central issues of any election campaign can be drawn from two different analytical sources: the parties' platforms and the parties' public debate in the media. These two sources generally overlap, in terms of their content, as one gets closer to the election date. Normally, the parties' public debate in the media reflects their main domains of competition as expressed in their electoral platforms. In the case of the campaign for the 2009 EP election, these two levels were more separated and less overlapping than ever. In particular, political discussion on the EU was practically absent in the media. On the contrary, European issues were present in the parties' election manifestos.

This divergence was a consequence of a number of factors. First of all, it stemmed from the fact that the EP elections coincided with local elections (in sixty provinces and in over 230 municipalities). Secondly, although a national rather than a European focus has always

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<sup>2</sup> The term was coined by the foremost Italian political scientist, Giovanni Sartori.

characterized political campaigns for the European elections in Italy, what has also become a typical feature of the more recent campaigns is a political competition highly centred around the person and the institutional role of the current Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi.

With respect to the positions expressed by the Italian political parties on the main themes of the EU, mostly to be found in the parties' manifestos, the fundamental differences resided around the questions of how much Europe and what kind of Europe. Nowadays, all the main Italian political parties treat the process of European integration as a positive feature. Even the LN, the regionalist party stressing the limits of EU integration with greater emphasis, overtly refused the Euro-sceptic label.

However, marked distinctions emerged on the degree to which European-level decision-making should overrule national sovereignty. The LN placed the greatest emphasis on the maintenance of Member States' traditions and autonomy. Particular attention to national identity was also given by the PDL and by the UDC. The position of the PD, the party most strongly campaigning on the European dimension, was more supranational.

The second divisive theme was that of European identity. The argument that the EU should rest upon its Christian roots and principles, and hence oppose further enlargement to non-Christian countries such as Turkey, was firmly stated by the right-wing and centre parties of the Italian political spectrum (with the exception of the PDL, which simultaneously favours a Christian-based Europe and Turkish admission). A Europe of differences and minorities instead lay at the core of the positions of the left-wing parties, including the centre-left PD. The parties' positions on migration were strictly related, the right being more restrictive than the left. Finally, differences emerged around the economic model that the EU should bring forward. The parties on the very left of the political spectrum supported 'another Europe', alternative to the neo-liberal economic model, while different degrees of liberalism were advanced by the others.

When we take into account the political debate in the Italian media, the EU vanishes. The communication campaign of the EP, although noticeable, was overshadowed by the prevalence of national issues. The only time during the campaign in which the EU was mentioned in the media was in the debate on the migration regulation policy. All political forces declared that migration should be considered a phenomenon of European relevance, to be faced and solved at the EU level. Apart from this, and apart from those issues concerning the institutional figure of the Italian PM, the main themes for party competition were related to the financial crisis, unemployment, fixed-period jobs and the welfare state. Euthanasia and State secularism forcefully emerged as new themes. Surprisingly little debated, instead, was the return to nuclear energy, recently introduced by the Italian government.

Eurobarometer polls reveal that Italian citizens have traditionally maintained a positive image of the EU. Italians tend to trust EU institutions and focus on the benefits rather than the burdens of the EU more than other member state populations. Simultaneously, though, the percentages in terms of actual knowledge of EU institutions remain lower than the European average. Taking for granted the absolute centrality of the media in determining the type and the level of information provided to citizens, it can be confidently argued that the 2009 election campaign did not make Italian citizens any the wiser. This is not a novelty in the history of European election campaigns in Italy. One single novelty can, however, be signalled: before this last campaign it had never previously been underlined how serious it is that so little is said on Europe.

### **The election campaign**

On 2 June, the President of the Italian Republic criticized the EP election campaign for being "beyond measure", expressing his disappointment at the lack of "attention to European issues". As mentioned before, unlike that of the 2008 general election, the EP campaign was characterized by a high level of contestation between the two main competitors: the PDL and the PD. The challenge was between Berlusconi and the new secretary of the PD, Franceschini, who had replaced the previous leader Veltroni (a victim of internal party fighting) a few months before



the election. Nevertheless, apart from the debate about the less-than-private life of the current prime minister, the campaign failed, indeed, to offer much.

Nonetheless, the start had been quite different. The auspices for a more European campaign were found in Franceschini's decision to start it on a train connecting several European cities, where eminent personalities of the European progressive left lectured young PD supporters. However, Berlusconi did not seem willing to get engaged in the campaign during his 'honeymoon' with the Italian people. But the 'danger' of a normal campaign was *ex abrupto* cancelled by three major events touching the Italian PM: the severe discomfort expressed by his wife (who later asked for a divorce) at the manner in which Berlusconi's party decided upon EP candidatures; the discovery of a close relationship between Berlusconi and a girl under 18; a sentence by an Italian court according to which the PM had bribed an English lawyer to avoid a conviction for corruption.

The combined effect of these events provoked a complete change in Berlusconi's campaign strategy. He started appearing frequently on national and local networks, by far his preferred means of communication, to reply in person to what he considered to be "insults and personal attacks".

By contrast, the campaign of the PD was certainly structured in a more traditional manner. Franceschini travelled around Italy by train and held frequent rallies with potential electors. The electoral programme was presented relatively soon (on 15 May) and big posters were hung. For several reasons, however, the policy themes and European agendas were eventually overshadowed by Berlusconi's 'obsession': the final pleas to electors warned that "on 6 and 7 June it is not just a matter of European elections, but about the quality of Italian democracy".

As for the other parties, both the regionalist Northern League party and the Christian-Democratic UDC decided to stress their diversity by not emphasizing the 'private' problems of the prime minister. The former put the accent on its success and effectiveness while in government (especially in the fight against illegal immigrants), while the latter blamed both the PDL and the PD for not talking about the 'real' problems of the Italian people following the economic crisis. Regarding campaign activities, the LN concentrated on local initiatives and meetings, while the UDC plastered the walls of Italian cities with big posters.

Another divisive issue became that of the presentation of the candidates after the decision of some well-known politicians to present themselves to the voters despite occupying certain national offices incompatible – according to Italian law – with a European mandate. Thus, for instance, Berlusconi headed *five*, and the MP and IDV leader Di Pietro *four* of the regional constituencies into which Italy is divided. The PD accused Berlusconi of fooling the voters, but if the picture is broadened to take into account not only the party leadership, but also local administrators and more obscure backbenchers, no party can really escape from some blame. Almost one third of the candidates of the PDL, twenty percent of the PD, and a handful of the UDC and the IDV<sup>3</sup> had potentially incompatible mandates: in these cases, national politicians have traditionally privileged their national office rather than a more insecure European career.

A second important matter regarded the selection of candidates. The biggest issue in this campaign centred around the inclusion in Berlusconi's party's electoral lists of young girls, arguably selected more for their physical appearance than for their political merits. The topic achieved momentum when Berlusconi's wife drew attention to it. Eventually, the PDL placed only one show-girl on its lists, apparently following a direct intervention by Berlusconi.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it has to be recognized that placing well-known candidates on the lists to maximise votes was not limited to the PDL. For instance, the heir to the Savoia royal family, the recent winner of a popular TV show, ran for the UDC. More generally, even though the parties re-presented a good number of former MEPs, the candidates with European or international expertise were in a minority compared with politicians with a national orientation.

<sup>3</sup> G. Trovati, *Il Sole24Ore*, 01.06.2009.

<sup>4</sup> F. Bei, *La Repubblica*, 30.04.2009.

From the start of the campaign the opinion polls provided a clear picture: the elections would be a personal triumph for Berlusconi and a severe defeat for the PD. In March already, Berlusconi claimed that his party had 42.1% of the votes, with the PD dropping to a minimum of 22.5%. In May, Berlusconi claimed that the PDL had grown to 45%, and on the eve of the election the PM foresaw “extraordinary results” for his party. Taking into account all the polls carried out in May, the PDL oscillated between 38.8 and 41.5%, with the PD between 25 and 27.4%. The other parties represented in the EP would be the LN (about 10%), the IDV (about 7%) and the UDC (about 6%). In the 2009-2014 legislature, according to the polls, there would be no MEPs from the Communist Left.<sup>5</sup>

Although Euro-parties get a significant quota of public funding from the EU, their role in the Italian campaign was minor. A few parties opened the campaign together with the leaders of the transnational organizations but, significantly, no Italian party adopted the manifesto of the Euro party of which it is a member. The PD could not even campaign as a member of a transnational party, being split between two different EP groups. In contrast, Berlusconi often mentioned that the PDL was likely to be the biggest national delegation in the EPP, with clear national advantages (such as the EP presidency).

Finally, a note on the cost of the campaign. Data are not yet available, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the average cost per candidate was around 300,000 euros.<sup>6</sup> Costs of campaigning for the EP elections are higher than for the national elections: in the former, the list is open with up to three preferences, forcing candidates to compete (and spend) for votes.

## Results

After the count of the ballots, the centre-right clearly prevailed: as in the rest of the EU, the left was in disarray, and right-wing and populist parties further consolidated their positions. Both the PDL and the PD lost some of their electoral support in favour of their respective allies: the LN and the IDV. All in all, these elections further penalized those parties that lost representation in the national Parliament in 2008.

And the impact of the scandals involving Berlusconi? Clearly, they were not determinant for the overall result of the elections. The personal success of the prime minister was more limited than expected, but the *Popolo della Libertà*, while not meeting the most optimistic hypotheses performed better than in the national elections. Even if the scandals produced some backlash, they did not compromise the resilience of the ruling coalition. In fact, one must not forget the high fragmentation and the serious internal problems of the parties of the left, which make them comparatively weak. Furthermore, the PD was in no better position than the LN to exploit a similar distress for Berlusconi's party. Finally, as the media of different political affiliation provided very different accounts and evaluations of the facts involving Berlusconi, the lack of a clear understanding of the events might have consolidated, rather than altered, previous electoral choices.

Turnout was low. The historical minimum of 65.05% was 6.7% less than in 2004, 5.5% less than expected and 7-10% lower than in the concomitant local elections. Besides a persistent downward trend, steeper since 1994, some additional factors concur to explain it. First, the context of economic slowdown hindered electoral participation, while the 2004 elections enjoyed extraordinary salience during a difficult moment for the centre-right executive. Second, the electoral success of the smaller parties at the expense of the coalition leaders PDL and PD could signal a higher level of Euro-scepticism, which, in turn, could be related to the level of turnout. Third, the fact that about one half of the Italian MEPs quit their mandate during the previous legislature reinforced the lowly perception of the EP as a waiting room for more prestigious positions. At the same time, the unexpectedly high level of abstentions in regions such as Sicily, Sardinia and Calabria had a great influence on the national average, showing the relevance of subnational dynamics.

<sup>5</sup> The sources for the data presented are: *Reuters*, 18.03.09; *Il Sole24ore*, 09.05.2009; *ASCA*, 04.06.2009. Polls available at <http://elezioni-blog.net/sondaggi-europee-2009/>, accessed 12.06.2009.

<sup>6</sup> F. Mancini, *La Stampa*, 04.06.2009.

**Table 18-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Italy**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Freedom People	PDL	35.26	29	EPP
Democratic Party + People's Party of Südtirol	PD SVP	26.13 0.46	21 1	S&D EPP
Northern League	LN	10.20	9	EFD
Italy of Values	IDV	8.00	7	ALDE
Union of the Centre	UDC	6.51	5	EPP
Communist Refoundation Party	PRC			
European Left	SE	3.38	0	-
Italian Communists	PDCI			
Left and Freedom	SL	3.12	0	-
Pannella and Bonino's List	RI	2.42	0	-
The Right Movement for the Autonomies Pensioners' Party Alliance of the Centre	LaDestra MPA Pensionati ADC	2.22	0	-
Tricoloured Flame	FT	0.79	0	-
Workers' Communist Party	PCDL	0.54	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>72</b>	

Notes: Election Threshold 4%; Turnout 65.05%.

Abbreviations: EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/italy\\_en.html#ancr3](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/italy_en.html#ancr3)

The elections brought a consistent level of turnover, only partially related to the reduction in the number of seats available (from 78 to 72): only 18 MEPs elected in 2004, or entering later as substitutes, will be reconfirmed in the seventh legislature. One reason is that the majority of Italian parties proposed their leaders and front rank members in multiple constituencies, even when they were not eligible: as a consequence, second rank members could easily sneak in with a handful of preferences in the shadow of omnipresent party leaders, while candidates with several thousands of votes collected over the national territory could fail to gain a seat.

The threshold of 4% prevented the appointment of important leaders such as the former MEP Fava and former Commissioner Bonino. Most noticeable among the winners were Mastella (PDL), back with the centre-right after fifteen years of political drift, and De Mita (UDC), one of leaders of the former Christian Democracy Party. The public demand for less corruption in the political system favoured the former prosecutor De Magistris (IDV) and Rita Borsellino (PD), sister of a prosecutor killed by the *mafia*.

The European elections are unlikely to produce any major transformative effect on national politics. Their nature of "second order national elections" seems to be reconfirmed, together with the equilibrium between the right and left poles and the (low) electoral volatility within them. One important effect of these electoral results will be a reduction in the level of fragmentation of the Italian delegation in the seventh EP. Previously, in 2008, Italy had had a particularly fragmented representation – no less than 18 MEPs were heading a party

delegation (sometimes made up of a single member). By contrast, in the new legislature the Italian parties will be bigger and less divided, more likely, then, to make an impact in the European assembly.

## 19

## LITHUANIA

*Renata Mieñkowska-Norkiene and Egle Kavoliunaite*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The last general elections in Lithuania of October 2008 saw the victory of the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Conservatives (TS-LKD), returning to power for the first time since 2000. Lacking an absolute majority, they created a pragmatic rather than ideological coalition with the National Resurrection Party (TPP) (established barely a few months before the elections and having no clear political programme) and the Liberals' Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS). Despite low expectations of its survival, the coalition seems to present unexpectedly coherent views on most of the challenges faced by the government, but whether it will deliver until the next general election, scheduled for late 2012, is an open question.

The current political situation in Lithuania has been strongly influenced by the result of the presidential elections which took place in May 2009. The new president is an outgoing European Commissioner for Financial Programming and Budget, and a former Lithuanian minister of finance, Dalia Grybauskaitė. She does not belong to any political party and claims to be pragmatic rather than ideologically oriented.

Over its years of independence (since March 1990), Lithuania has not developed a stable party system. There are many parties on the Lithuanian political scene and new ones appear from time to time. 15 parties expressed a wish to participate in the 2009 Elections for the European Parliament. The Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) and the TS-LKD are currently the two strongest parties on the political scene. A phenomenon notable in Lithuanian politics is the presence of populist parties, which are created before elections, have one or several well-known leaders and gain a fair number of votes. This was the case before the last national general election. However, surprisingly, no new political party was created before the EP elections. Political scientists note that compared to other Member States, Lithuania has so far not seen the emergence of radical or extreme parties on either side of the political spectrum. The lack of meaningful anti-Europe political parties or even political movements is also significant.

### Issues

A few main topics related to Lithuania's European policy were identified by the leaders of the parties participating in the European Parliament elections. These topics were:

- 1) energy security and such related issues as building a new atomic power plant to replace Ignalina (the only Lithuanian atomic power plant – built in Soviet times and needing to be replaced by a modern power plant) or putting into place new energy co-operation arrangements with other EU member states and Russia,
- 2) participation in the EU strategy for defeating the economic crisis,

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- 3) strategy for joining the euro zone,
- 4) strengthening Lithuania's role as an important partner of other EU Member States.

The above issues were, however, mentioned in the party leaders' statements only in relation to key domestic issues: ensuring the employment of proper procedures for attracting a national atomic plant investor; defeating the crisis by stimulating domestic growth and using the best available instruments – not only European but also those set up by the International Monetary Fund; and finally keeping to the requirements of EU convergence criteria by strictly cutting expenditure in the domestic budget (the Conservatives are for cutting expenditure while the Social Democrats do not support the limitation of any, particularly social, budget). The really serious challenges to be faced in domestic policy, caused mainly by the economic crisis, prevented the Lithuanian political parties from discussing values, principles or even strategies for future EU development as they did not seem to attract enough attention from potential voters, who were absorbed by down-to-earth economic problems. The only exceptions were the future development of structural support for new member states and the role of Lithuania in European policy towards Russia.<sup>2</sup> The need for structural funds does not create divisions between the Lithuanian parties' political programmes, but the question of Russia draws a line between the Social Democrats and Homeland Union. The latter has a clear attitude that Russia poses a potential threat to Lithuania.

The European Parliament elections did not cause as much interest among the public the parliamentary election of 2008 and the presidential election of May 2009. This is mostly because of the fact that European matters are perceived as less important than domestic ones.<sup>3</sup> The financial crisis, however, pointed the attention of some groups towards the European Union as a better forum for finding solutions than Lithuanian domestic institutions. These groups are mainly entrepreneurs exporting and importing their goods within the EU market, Lithuanians who have emigrated to other EU member states, and young and ambitious canvassers. This is, however, not the common attitude. Moreover, the European Union is identified in this case more with the Council and the European Commission than with the European Parliament. The Parliament is rather considered to be a European body with hardly any power to influence the welfare of Lithuanian society. The national and local media seemed to support this point of view.<sup>4</sup>

Most important Lithuanian political parties have a 'catch-all' strategy as regards European matters in their political programmes, which means that their Europe-related programmes contain many different, but usually very general, issues. In this context, the statements of party leaders play a more important role when identifying the differences between the parties than their political programmes. Some of the parties, despite their importance on the national political stage, did not produce a European Parliament election manifesto, e.g. the National Resurrection Party, which based its campaign in the European elections on the decreasing but still present popularity of its leaders. Of the 15 political parties registered in the EP elections, only a few actually presented any coherent programme (or even a part of their overall programme) related to Europe. The national and local media noticed this and indicated that it was a failing of the parties and politicians. It is worth noting that while debating on European topics, most candidates usually answered using their experience from the past or by referring to Lithuania's domestic situation to cover their lack of knowledge about the real role of MEPs or their parties' lack of a clear statement on an issue. This was the case before the European Parliament elections in 2004, when citizens were asked in a poll to list those political leaders who, in their opinion, had the best attitude towards European matters. Most respondents chose party leaders who had the best support at that time – mainly due to their attitude towards domestic matters.

<sup>2</sup> 'Lietuvoje įsivyras sveika nuovoka?', *Klaipėda*, 11.6.2009, <http://klaipeda.diena.lt/dienrastis/lietuva/lietuvoje-isyvyras-sveika-nuovoka-147101>, accessed 12.6. 2009.

<sup>3</sup> 'Europos parlamento rinkimų svarbą', *Veidas*, 1.6.2009, <http://www.veidas.lt/lt/leidinys.full/40c04f2e910ec>, accessed 4.6.2009.

<sup>4</sup> As an example, less air time was devoted to TV programmes and broadcasts related to the EP elections than to those about the general or presidential elections.

Paradoxically, most of these leaders had, however, hardly any clear vision of how to deal with European matters in Lithuania or even very little knowledge of them.<sup>5</sup>

In the 2009 European Parliament elections the situation seemed to be better in that in television adverts, in statements, and on official websites etc., the parties referred to European matters. However, such references were usually rather general. For example, the Lithuanian Conservatives referred to the expected win of the parties belonging to the EPP group in the European Parliament and thus underlined their future meaningful role in the house. The Liberals put much weight on assuring the free movement of people in the EU, as if it were a problematic question for Lithuania (which, in fact, it is not, considering Lithuania's participation in the Schengen pact). "Order and Justice" – the party of former president Rolandas Paksas – on the other hand proclaimed populist slogans about fighting the growing European bureaucracy. These slogans, however, only supported Order and Justice's much more radical views in domestic policy.

To a certain extent, journalists made efforts to encourage the politicians to reveal the differences between their 'European views'. In most debates, however, despite journalistic efforts, statements related to domestic policy seemed to dominate the discourse. This led to a lack of any essential deeper EP election-related debate on the most important Lithuanian European topics. There was also a lack of any great media or NGO campaign to mobilize the public to participate in the EP elections. There were a few TV or radio broadcasts devoted to presenting participation in the elections as a common responsibility of the whole society, but they did not seem to have the hoped-for echo nationwide.

Lithuanian public opinion has constantly demonstrated a high level of support for EU membership,<sup>6</sup> and so hardly any political party with ambitions to really count in the European Parliament elections claimed to be against the EU, or for terminating EU membership. Therefore, and also due to the limited number of MEPs from Lithuania, the differences in the political slogans of most of the parties before the EP elections were not based on general questions like whether Lithuanian membership in the EU is good for the Lithuanian people or the conditions under which Lithuania's voice should be taken into consideration. The candidates rather concentrated on promises to achieve general (though hardly achievable) goals such as active participation in conquering the economic crisis (Conservatives), securing welfare for various social groups (Social Democrats), defeating corruption and oligarchy in Lithuania (members of the radical party "Frontas"), limiting 'European bureaucracy' (most of the parties, particularly the National Resurrection Party).

Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings related to the essentials of the preparation of Lithuanian political parties for the EP elections, it should be said that nevertheless the 2009 campaign seemed to be more programme-based and less populist than that of 2004.

### **The election campaign**

Although the election campaign for the European Parliament was officially launched on 8 May, the real campaigning only started after the Presidential election (17 May), which to a large extent explains the low intensity of the campaign and the voters' lack of interest.

In general, the campaign may be summarised as dull and uninspiring. It is difficult, or even impossible, to talk about the parties' communication strategies, as from the information submitted by the parties on their internet sites and through other means of communication, in most cases they did not have any strategy, or their strategies were incoherent. Most voter information was delivered during TV and radio debates, although other means of information were used, such as posters in public places and the internet. However, the latter sources were hardly significant. One heard many candidates on the TV and radio, but it seems that most

<sup>5</sup> 'Europarlamentą valdo politinės šeimos', *Vakarų Ekspresas*, <http://www.ve.lt/?data=2003-10-15&rub=1065924810&id=1066202086>, accessed 13.10. 2008.

<sup>6</sup> See: the results of opinion polls conducted by the Market and Opinion Research Centre VILMORUS, <http://www.euro.lt/en/lithuanias-membership-in-the-eu/lithuanian-public-opinion/>, accessed 12.5.2009.

of the candidates, especially those from small parties, did not understand what the powers of the European Parliament are or what they could do in this institution, as much of the debates related to internal problems.

The parties' official programmes were not discussed during the public debates, and it seems that they were mainly written for political scientists, not voters. This passiveness was received by both political scientists and journalists as the result of disillusionment and election tiredness after 3 elections in 8 months.

No great funds were dedicated to the campaign either. On a preliminary count, a total of more than 2 million LTL (580,000 euros) was budgeted by the 15 registered parties with slightly less actually being spent. Most of the funds, i.e. about 1.6 million LTL was allocated by the parties themselves, while the rest of the sum was donated by natural and legal persons. Most of the spending consisted of the election deposit, which amounted to about LTL 700,000, i.e. 40% of the entire spending, to be reimbursed in the event of partaking in mandate distribution. The parties spent half a million LTL, i.e. 30% of the total, on political commercials on TV. The biggest spend of the campaign was by the *Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija* (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania), approximately LTL 500,000 (about 145,000 euros). Comparing the figures for the 2009 European Parliament campaign with those for 2004, this year's were only a half. Although in 2004 only 13 parties participated in the elections, they received a total of 4.3 million LTL, and spent 4.7 million LTL.<sup>7</sup>

On the European Parliament elections, the media provided more information on the prognosis of political scientists than on the opinion polls. These were much less popular than those during the elections for the National Parliament or the presidential elections. However, the most cited poll, which promised most of the vote to the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, corresponded neither with the prognosis of political scientists, nor that of the results.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the candidates for the European Parliament were known to the public. One group were current Members of the European Parliament, another group consisted of well-known persons who had not engaged in political activity before, and a third group consisted of those who tried to extricate themselves from their Lithuanian political activity by going to the European Parliament because they had difficulties of some kind in taking part in local political activity. This was the case, for example, of the former President Rolandas Paksas (who had been accused of breaking his oath to the Republic of Lithuania) and Viktoras Uspaskich (who is under criminal investigation for party financial activities).

To sum up, the election campaign did not induce voters to turn out (as was later seen from the results).

## Results

As might be expected, voter turnout was dramatically low, especially compared to the 48.38% scored in 2004. Only 20.92% of Lithuanians participated in the 2009 elections. This low participation was generally explained (also by the politicians themselves) by bad weather on the election day, a poor election campaign, and most importantly by voter fatigue after the numerous elections held in 2009.<sup>9</sup>

The clear winner was the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, scoring almost 27% of the vote and gaining 4 mandates. Its victory can be interpreted from several perspectives. First, since the campaign was based on national, rather than European themes, the voters 'transferred' their ideas of who to vote for from the previous general election. This mechanism was further exacerbated by the dull and low-profile campaigns, which did not even allow voters to learn the parties' strategies towards the EU, and hence change their preferences.

<sup>7</sup> Information from the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania: <http://www.vrk.lt/lt/naujienos/pateiktos-pradines-EP-ataskaitos.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bernardinai.lt/index.php?url=articles/94755>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.delfi.lt/news/balsuok2009/europarlament/article.php?id=22526942>.



At the time of the European Parliament election, some voters also expressed the need to support the government in fighting the crisis, and therefore to support the governing party's representatives in Brussels, rather than the opposition, which nevertheless gained only 1 seat less than the governing party. The National Resurrection Party, which in the 2008 national elections scored 15.1% and was ranked the second largest party, this time lost dramatically, scoring only 1.04% of the vote and no seats. However, this drop is not surprising, given that the party was one of those created only shortly before the recent national elections by show business representatives, artists and the like, and was led by a TV producer and comedian. Without presenting any clear programme, it failed to capitalize on the initial trust given it in the national elections. The Order and Justice (Liberal Democratic) Party won 2 seats, and the Liberal Movement for the Republic of Lithuania, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (supported only by a large Polish minority, composing slightly less than 10% of the population), and finally the Labour Party, gained 1 seat each.

**Table 19-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Lithuania**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	TS-LKD	26.86	4	EPP
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	LSDP	18.61	3	S&D
Order and Justice	TT	12.22	2	EFD
Labour Party	DP	8.79	1	ALDE
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania	LLRA (AWPL)	8.42	1	ECR
Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania	LRLS	7.36	1	ALDE
Liberal and Centre Union	LiCS	3.47	0	-
Lithuanian Centre Party	LCP	3.09	0	-
Christian Conservative Social Union	KKSS	2.93	0	-
Front Party	FRONTO	2.43	0	-
Lithuanian Peasant Popular Union	LVLS	1.87	0	-
Civic Democratic Party	PDP	1.35	0	-
Samogitian Party	ZP	1.27	0	-
National Resurrection Party	TPP	1.04	0	-

*Notes:* Turnout 20.92%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/lithuania\\_en.html#ancre3](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/lithuania_en.html#ancre3).



## 20

## LUXEMBOURG

*Patrick Dumont and Astrid Spreitzer*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Ever since 1979, the EP elections have taken place simultaneously with the legislative elections in Luxembourg. Therefore, the latest general election was held on 7 June 2009, after a parliamentary term marked amongst other things by Luxembourg's presidency of the Council of the EU, the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and the start of the global financial crisis in the autumn of 2008, when the government decided to bail out Dexia and Fortis banks (the banking and insurance sector being, as is widely known, a crucial one in the country's economy). Despite some cracks amongst the governing partners during the campaign, they appeared to be willing to continue working together, and this was facilitated by the June 2009 legislative election results: its big winner was indeed undoubtedly the Christian-Social party (CSV) of the highly popular Prime Minister (since 1995) Jean-Claude Juncker, which managed to score its best result since the late 1950s with more than 38% of the votes, giving it 43% of the seats in the Chamber. This confirmed its role as senior coalition partner in the new Christian Democrat-Socialist cabinet in late July (the CSV has only been in opposition from 1974 to 1979 in the post-war era). Its incumbent junior coalition partner, the Socialist party (LSAP), lost support but remained, with more than 20%, the country's second largest party. The main opposition parties either lost at the polls (the Liberals, DP, and the conservative and Euro-sceptic Democrat Reform Party, ADR) or remained stable (the Greens, Déi Gréng) with votes between 15% and 8%. The radical left Déi Lénk managed to re-enter the Chamber in 2009 with one MP, thereby increasing the number of political parties represented in the Chamber back to six.

Voting is compulsory in Luxembourg, and the electorate may cast their votes for a single party list (list vote) or for candidates from one or more parties (this personal vote is referred to as inter-party 'panachage').<sup>2</sup> In 2009 participation reached 90.9% (for the 90.75% at the EP elections, see below), a drop of 1% compared to 2004.

### Issues

Luxembourg is characterized by genuine support for European integration, both among voters and parties. All electoral programmes – except for that of the Communists – for the EP elections described Luxembourg's EU membership as a necessity and a benefit to the country. The CSV claims to be the "Luxemburgische Europapartei" (Luxembourgish Party for Europe) and

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<sup>2</sup> At national elections, it is compulsory for all nationals aged over 18 to vote. Non-voting may be punished by a fine. Elderly persons aged 75+ are excluded from the obligation to vote. The same applies to nationals at the European elections, but the conditions for the participation of non-nationals changed in 2008: the time gap between the registration of residing EU citizens and the date of the elections was reduced from almost a year to around three months and the duration of residence requirement was lowered from five to two years. In 2009 the number of registered non-nationals rose by 50% and represented about 7% of the voting population. Whenever they are registered for EP elections, EU citizens are also obliged to vote.

campaigned for a “strong Luxembourg in a strong Europe”, pointing to Luxembourg’s successful Council presidency under its leadership. The LSAP was the only party which referred to the European (Socialists) party manifesto and their principles in their party programme. DP and Déi Gréng took clearly pro-integrationist stances too, although for different reasons: the latter mentioned foreign policy issues (human rights, international cooperation and development) and environmental policy and the need to cooperate when fighting climate change, whilst the former mainly promoted the Common market and economic policy issues. Much less enthusiastic about Europe, but willing to reform EU institutions, are the ADR, Déi Lénk and the newly created BiergerLëscht. The former were the only group in the Chamber to oppose the European Constitutional Treaty (after having supported it) in the last weeks before the 2005 referendum on that matter. The ADR opposes the devolution of sovereign rights to the EU, supports a Europe of the Nations and therefore welcomes the strengthening of the power of national parliaments, campaigns against further enlargement, especially to Turkey, and insists on the defence of national identity through the promotion of the Luxembourgish language and the non-opening of civil service jobs to non-nationals. The radical left Déi Lénk and the BiergerLëscht campaigned for a more democratic and social Europe. But whilst the former supported the granting of more powers to the EP and intervention of the EU in the economy, the latter – which opposed the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and claimed to represent those who voted against the European Constitutional Treaty at the 2005 referendum – partially adopted views similar to the ADR by insisting on the role of the national language and the advent of a Europe of independent nations, where small countries would keep their veto rights. Finally, only the KPL calls for the dissolution of the EU because its institutions have always served the powers of the free market.

Given that Luxembourg is a small country with an open economy and one of the three seats of the EU next to Brussels and Strasbourg, it is no great surprise that its population and main interest groups in general share the attitudes of the political elite: mainly pro-EU integration with a common concern regarding the treatment of smaller member states, combined with a defence of few, but crucial, national interests. The 2005 referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty, however, showed a clear split between the parties represented in the Chamber, who massively favoured the adoption of the European Constitutional Treaty, and the population, who barely approved the text with a 56.5% majority. This result was in part due to sentiments that developed during the early 2000s, which witnessed a slow-down of the economy and growing fears of unemployment after years of abundant growth, in a peculiar country where foreigners (either trans-border commuters or foreigners living in Luxembourg) already represent a large majority of the labour market. Partly related to these fears is the population’s clear rejection of further enlargements (mainly to the Balkan states and Turkey) of the EU in the close future.

### **The election campaign**

It is worth noting that, because of the simultaneity of national and EP elections, the first ‘real’ EU campaign in Luxembourg occurred on the occasion of the 2005 referendum. The June 2009 election campaign proved to be much akin to previous ones, with parties, media and citizens all considering the elections leading to national executive power as the most important. Each party organized only a couple of meetings exclusively on European issues (but candidates for the EP elections often appeared in more general meetings) and there were no signs that the parties spent more than the 10-15% of the general campaign budget that they declared to have devoted to the EP election in 2004.<sup>3</sup> The two largest parties (CSV and LSAP) declared that their overall campaign budgets amounted to 1-1.2 million euros, with only about 20,000 euros to 36,000 euros for the small radical left parties. The newcomer BiergerLëscht announced a surprising amount of 250,000 euros to finance its campaign costs (note that parties which present complete lists for the European elections are entitled to state subsidies to reimburse EU campaign costs, separate from those related to the national ones).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> P. Dumont, F. Fehlen, R. Kies, Ph. Poirier, *Les élections législatives et européennes de 2004 au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Synthèse du rapport élaboré pour la Chambre des Députés*, Service Central des Imprimés de l’Etat, Luxembourg, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> If they obtain a minimum of 5% of the votes, they are eligible for financial support and reimbursement of the costs

A trend towards the professionalization of the campaign has been felt since 1999, as advertising agencies have been hired to manage the parties' communication. The limited (free) official election campaign broadcasting time and the possibility of buying TV and radio advertisements favour the larger and richer parties. As a result, the smaller ones invested mainly in newer (internet websites, videos, chats, blogs, social networks etc.) and older (door-to-door canvassing, street marketing, information meetings) techniques, activities that larger parties also widely adopted in 2009.

A first analysis of media reporting shows that the four main national newspapers devoted about 73% of their election campaign reports to the national elections only.<sup>5</sup> Reports covering the European elections amounted to less than 19%, and the rest mixed the two. One month before elections, Luxembourgish law forbids publishing or even commenting on opinion polls. The polls carried out before May mainly focused on the national elections, as the results of both elections are assumed to be somewhat similar (which usually proves true). The largest media outlets contracted opinion poll institutes, and the results of the 'Politmonitor' of the newspaper *Luxemburger Wort* showed that the top candidates in the national elections were the incumbent Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker (CSV), ranked by far the highest, followed by the Deputy Prime Minister Jean Asselborn (LSAP). Green leader Francois Bausch proved more popular than the frontrunner (Claude Meisch) of the third largest party, the DP.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the head of the European list of the latter party (Charles Goerens) was by far the most popular of the EP elections candidates and was much better ranked than the DP president, who was the party's alternative to Juncker as potential Prime minister. In another survey, RTL, the Luxembourgish radio and television company revealed that Europe was not one of the main concerns for Luxembourgish citizens (the economy was the most salient),<sup>7</sup> whilst another main newspaper, *Tageblatt*, showed in its *Politbarometer* that whereas 82% would continue to vote at national elections if compulsory voting was abolished, only 73% would do so for the European ones.

Although the jobs of MP and MEP are incompatible, being a candidate for both the national and European elections at the same time is allowed. Previous elections showed that double candidatures on national and European lists helped parties to capitalize on their heavyweights, and that these heavyweights were keen to measure their popularity by competing in the single country-wide constituency used for EP elections.<sup>8</sup> Candidates elected at both levels then have to choose between their national and European mandate, which, however, results in the main party delegations to the EP cutting their main figures, who prefer national executive positions.<sup>9</sup> A reform of the electoral law limiting the number of candidates to six (instead of twelve previously) in order to reduce the 'safety net' of non-elected candidates and an arrangement between the four main parties (those that had a representative in the EP) not to present double candidatures, both in 2008, changed this traditional set-up: in 2009, therefore, the CSV, LSAP, DP and the Greens presented lists of six candidates who exclusively fought the EP elections, whereas the smaller parties, lacking popular figures to fill their lists, kept the previous practice of double candidatures.

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of postal mailings: from a minimum of 12,500 euros to a maximum of 74,500 euros for those that manage to gain more than 25% of the vote. Additionally, each seat won is worth an additional 12,500 euros. Apart from this public money dedicated to the reimbursement of campaign costs, party budgets are mainly made up from their MPs' contributions, membership fees and donations, and, since 2008, state financing. In 2009, this amounted to 900,000 for the CSV, 570,000 for the LSAP, 422,000 for the DP, 350,000 for Déi Gréng and 250,000 euros for the ADR.

<sup>5</sup> M. Huberty, 'The National Legislative and European Parliament Elections in Luxembourg, 7 June 2009', *EPERN Election briefings series*, University of Sussex, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.wort.lu/wort/web/letzebuerg/artikel/08087/vorteil-fuer-die-regierenden.php> and <http://www.wort.lu/wort/web/letzebuerg/artikel/19867/eine-bequeme-ausgangslage.php>

<sup>7</sup> <http://wahlen.rtl.lu/news/tns-ilres/17190.html> and <http://wahlen.rtl.lu/news/tns-ilres/17144.html>

<sup>8</sup> In 2004, 58 of the 60 EP candidates of the five larger parties also fought in national elections.

<sup>9</sup> In 2004, the three MEPs of the CSV had not been elected but took up the position due to the appointment of those elected as ministers in the national government.

The first signs of the upcoming elections arrived in Autumn 2008 with the Greens adopting their electoral programme, common for both national and European elections, and their list of candidates in a congress assembling 120 members. The outgoing MEP and vice-president of the European Greens, Claude Turmes, was, as expected, chosen to lead the list and therefore fight for a third term in the EP. Among the other candidates were two young students and one non-Luxembourger, and altogether there were 3 female candidates. The CSV and the LSAP presented their manifesto (a separate European one for the former, a common one for the latter, with explicit references to that of the European Socialists in the European section) in January 2009. The CSV list was headed by a very well-known political figure, Viviane Reding, Luxembourgish Commissioner for information society and media, but also contained the outgoing (and long-standing) MEP Astrid Lulling. Not surprisingly, the LSAP's frontrunner was Robert Goebbels, their only MEP in the 6th legislature of the EP and former minister. The DP list (another party that published a separate Europe-specific manifesto) was headed by Charles Goerens, former minister and former MEP. The four other lists were led by their party leaders, standing for both the national and European elections.<sup>10</sup> The ADR (and to a lesser extent the BiergerLëscht) list proved the least open to the representation of traditionally disadvantaged citizens such as women and non-nationals, with a male-only Luxembourgish composition. This list was also characterized by a high average age, only topped by that of the LSAP (56 years). Most parties, however, presented at least one non-national candidate (even two for the radical left lists) and allowed for gender parity, the Greens combining these characteristics and having the lowest average age of its candidates (42 years).

The first to officially launch their campaign were the Socialists at the end of April, and the other parties followed within a couple of days thus entering the core period of electoral competition. Several parties invited popular European figures from neighbouring countries, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit for Déi Gréng or Martin Schulz for the LSAP. This is worth mentioning, since critics in the German and French governments characterized Luxembourg as a 'tax haven' to be eliminated in the fight against the global crisis, which was badly felt by both the political elite and the population.<sup>11</sup> Most parties also campaigned against the growing threat of a 'directorship of the big member states' in the EU.

## Results

Because of the simultaneity of the European and national elections, and the single constituency with 6 MEPs to be elected, the voters had few incentives to spend their vote on small or extreme parties. The results for the legislative and European elections usually do not differ much at the aggregate level. This was clearly not the case for the CSV in 2009, which scored its best result in national elections since the late 1950s, but its worst result in EP elections since 1979. Its nearly 6% loss was mainly due to the absence of PM Juncker and other heavyweights on the European list, but the party managed to keep its three MEPs. Three other parties gained one seat, as in 2004. The LSAP did so despite a loss of support and, like its coalition government partner, had its worst result since 1979 (for the first time below the 20% level), whilst both the DP gained votes (contrary to its result in the national elections) thanks to its popular frontrunner Goerens,<sup>12</sup> and the Greens were also on the rise. The DP returned to third position in the hierarchy of parties in European elections, which it had lost to the Greens in 2004. Despite the fact that a majority of lists were gender-balanced, the Luxembourgish delegation elected to the EP only counts one female member (Astrid Lulling), as Viviane Reding retained her position in the EU Commission and is to be nominated (for a third term) to the next one.

<sup>10</sup> Note that the ADR was the third party to publish a European electoral manifesto as distinct from the national one.

<sup>11</sup> The German Socialists' party president (Franz Müntefering) declared that the closing down of tax havens was not rapid enough and that "in former times we [Germans, authors' note] would have sent our troops there. But today that is impossible"; German Socialist Finance Minister (Peer Steinbrück) compared Luxembourg's financial transparency (and that of the other small countries that still rely on banking secrecy) to that of Burkina-Faso. Much less shocking criticisms also came from various French political camps.

<sup>12</sup> He received the largest personal score with 112, 113 votes (voters may give up to 2 votes to the same candidate), overtaking the CSV EU Commissioner Reding (105,656) and the Green Claude Turmes (77,306), who scored more than the other outgoing MEP, LSAP's frontrunner Robert Goebbels.

**Table 20-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Luxembourg**

Party	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Christian Social People's Party	CSV	31.33	3	EPP
Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party	LSAP	19.42	1	S&D
Democratic Party	DP	18.71	1	ALDE
The Greens	Déi Gréng	16.84	1	G/EFA
Democrat Reform Party	ADR	7.37	0	-
The Left	Déi Lénk	3.41	0	-
Luxembourg Communist Party	KPL	1.54	0	-
BiergerLëscht (Party of citizens)	BL	1.37	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>6</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 90.75%

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/luxembourg\\_en.html#ancre4](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/luxembourg_en.html#ancre4)

The only main opposition party that scored less than in 2004 is the one that is most critical of European integration (ADR), but which in any case traditionally fares less well at EP elections than in national ones. Its result was far from what would have been needed to get one candidate elected. All the smaller parties, which to varying degrees are also the most Euro-sceptic, gained votes in the European elections. The result for the BiergerLëscht was, however, quite disappointing, while the two radical left parties altogether gained about 5%, almost twice their combined 2004 scores.





## THE NETHERLANDS

Carolien van Ham and Kaat Smets<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The last Dutch parliamentary election took place one year early in November 2006, after the social-liberal coalition partner Democrats 66 (D66) left the government coalition lead by Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende in June of the same year.<sup>2</sup> A centre-right CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal) – VVD (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy) caretaker minority government was formed to bridge the gap until the elections.

Although many expected a close race between the Christian-Democrats (CDA) and the Labour Party (PvdA), the CDA eventually gained 8 seats more than the PvdA in the 2006 Parliamentary Elections. The Socialist Party (SP) saw its number of seats more than doubled to 25 (out of 150). The newcomer Party for Freedom (PVV) entered the parliament with nine seats. This party, formed by former VVD parliamentarian Geert Wilders in 2004, is an anti-Islamist voice and combines economic liberalism with populism and cultural conservatism.<sup>3</sup> Another newcomer, the Party for the Animals (PvdD) won two seats. The VVD lost 6 seats, possibly because it had to compete with the PVV for the attention of former *List Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) voters and possibly also because of a power struggle between the two candidates for VVD party leadership, Rita Verdonk and Mark Rutte. The latter was eventually elected party leader by the party establishment in a very competitive leadership race. Verdonk, however, continued to run a strong campaign and eventually won more preferential votes than Rutte, who headed the party list.<sup>4</sup>

After the elections it was not immediately clear what coalition should govern the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> A collaboration between the CDA, PvdA and SP was explored and rejected. Instead, a combination of the CDA, PvdA and the *Christian Union* (CU) seemed a more viable option and by February 2007 an agreement was reached marking the beginning of the fourth government under Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA). Overall, the election was exemplary of the

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We would like to thank Jasper Laros, Joost van Spanje and Sarah de Lange for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter. The usual disclaimer applies.

<sup>2</sup> The reason behind the fall of the government was the decision of Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk of the conservative liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) to withdraw Dutch citizenship from parliamentarian Ayaan Hirshi Ali (also VVD), who was considered to have provided incomplete information in her application for refugee status. In the parliamentary debate that ensued, coalition partner D66 supported a vote of no confidence against Verdonk. The vote failed to obtain a majority and the D66 ministers subsequently announced their resignation.

<sup>3</sup> P. Lucardie, ‘The Netherlands’, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 46 (7-8), 2007, pp. 1041-1048.

<sup>4</sup> Verdonk was expelled from the VVD parliamentary group in September 2007 after openly criticizing party leader Rutte in a newspaper interview. She eventually left the party and started a new movement Proud of the Netherlands (TON). TON did not, however, compete in the elections for the European Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> Lucardie 2007, pp. 1074-1078.

volatile character of Dutch elections since the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> With nine parties in parliament after the elections, the Dutch party system remains highly fragmented.<sup>7</sup> During its mandate, the Balkenende IV government has mostly been pre-occupied with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (after the Dutch electorate rejected the European Constitution in the June 2005 referendum) and the economic crisis. The political and social debate has continued to be strongly focused on migration and integration issues, stimulated by key political players such as Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders. New parliamentary elections are expected to take place in 2011.

For the elections to the European Parliament (EP) a total of 17 parties competed for the 25 Dutch seats (compared to 15 parties for 27 seats in 2004). Votes are translated into seats according to a party-list system of proportional representation whereby seats are distributed at the national level. The Netherlands has no formal electoral threshold. The *de facto* threshold to gain a single seat hence is the number of votes divided by the number of seats. Newcomers on the European scene this year were the Euroskeptic PVV of Geert Wilders, which had steadily gained popularity since entering Parliament in 2006, and the smaller parties *Solidara*, *the Liberaal Democratische Partij* (Liberal Democratic Party), *Europa Voordelig! & Duurzaam* (Europe Advantageous and Sustainable), *De Groenen* (The Greens), *De Partij voor de Europese Politiek* (Party for European Politics), and the *Europese Klokkenluiders Party* (European Whistle-Blowers Party). The 2009 elections were also the first European elections in which European parties campaigned in the Netherlands, i.e. the Europhile New Europeans and Eurosceptic Libertas.

### Issues

Interest in the European Parliament elections was generally low in the Netherlands. Opinion polls in early May demonstrated that over half of the Dutch electorate did not know the date of the upcoming elections.<sup>8</sup> By the same token only 30% of the electorate indicated an intention to vote, compared to a 43% average in the EU.<sup>9</sup> The limited attention of Dutch citizens for the European elections was a topic of concern among candidates as well as in the media. Television programmes on the European elections consistently received low viewer satisfaction ratings, and research indicated that 16-25% of viewers switched to another channel when an item on the EP elections was shown on TV.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from having little interest in Europe, Dutch citizens continue to be critical in their evaluations of the European Union. As such, even though many citizens view the European Union as beneficial for strengthening Europe's economic competitiveness in general, they are less certain whether the EU has been beneficial for improving Dutch economic welfare. Moreover, they are critical towards further enlargement of the European Union, both in terms of new member states and in terms of policy competences.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> P. Mair, 'Electoral volatility and the Dutch Party System: A comparative perspective', *Acta Politica*, vol. 43 (2-3), 2008, pp. 235-253.

<sup>7</sup> K. Aarts and H. van der Kolk, 'The Parliamentary Election in the Netherlands, 22 November 2006', *Electoral Studies*, vol. 26 (4), 2007, pp. 832-837; A.P.M. Krouwel and P. Lucardie, 'Waiting in the wings: New parties in the Netherlands', *Acta Politica*, vol. 43 (2-3), 2008, pp. 278-307.

<sup>8</sup> Source: NRC 27-05-2009 EU-verkiezingen, wanneer dan? Based on an opinion poll carried out by TNS Opinion. Things did not improve much over the course of the campaign: in the week before the elections still only 44% of respondents knew the date of the elections (Source: Synovate.nl 30-05-2009 Europese Politieke Barometer).

<sup>9</sup> Source: NRC 27-05-2009 EU-verkiezingen, wanneer dan? Based on an opinion poll carried out by TNS Opinion.

<sup>10</sup> Source: NOS 29-05-2009 TV-kijker baalt van EU-verkiezingen. The Stichting Kijkonderzoek demonstrated that the national public news show, which at prime time is watched by about 1.2 million people, lost between 200,000 and 300,000 viewers within a minute of showing an item on the EP elections ([www.kijkonderzoek.nl](http://www.kijkonderzoek.nl)).

<sup>11</sup> A large-scale internet survey carried out in the weeks before the elections demonstrated that a majority of Dutch citizens agreed that economic policy, financial oversight and climate policy should be handled at the European level (50%, 54% and 52% respectively). However many also considered that policy areas like immigration policy and foreign policy should not be taken up at the EU level (53% and 52%), nor that more countries should enter the European Union (58%). Source: [www.21minuten.nl](http://www.21minuten.nl). Online opinion research among over 60,000 respondents, carried out by a consortium of public and private organizations under the name "De Publieke Zaak".

Where former campaigns for EP elections tended to focus heavily on national issues, European issues were relatively more prominent in the 2009 campaign. This was clearly related to the fact that parties were more polarized on the question of European integration than they were in earlier elections. Whereas in 2004 most parties took similar pro-European stances, the 2009 elections found a strongly Euro-sceptic PVV on the right of the political spectrum and a moderately Euro-sceptic SP on the left.<sup>12</sup> Even so, during the first weeks the campaign mainly focused on the success of the PVV in the opinion polls and the implications for the upcoming elections for the national parliament in 2011. The main topics in the campaign were the citizens' lack of interest in the EP elections, the economic crisis, European enlargement, European integration, how to strengthen democratic control of the EU and immigration and environmental policy.

The parties were least divided on the economic crisis and environmental policies.<sup>13</sup> The policy areas on which stronger polarization was visible were the questions of EU enlargement, European integration and how to improve democratic control of the European Union. The enlargement discussion focused mainly on the accession of Turkey, with the PVV, the small Christian SGP/ChristenUnie and the PvdD in their initial election manifestos being most clearly against Turkish accession. The CDA, SP and VVD were initially not explicitly against Turkish EU entry, but – along with D66 and GroenLinks – stressed the need to first improve democratic control within the current member states and the need for Turkey to meet the Copenhagen criteria. However, in the debates between the number one candidates on the party lists, the CDA, SP and VVD took a stronger stance against Turkish accession to the EU, shifting towards the position of the PVV.

Concerning European integration, the Euro-sceptic parties PVV, SP and to a lesser extent the PvdD, stressed the need for the European Union to focus on a limited set of core policy areas such as economic cooperation and environmental policy, while leaving foreign policy and defence policy to the Member States. The other parties campaigned in favour of expanding European policy cooperation in these policy areas. A bone of contention marking the unique position of the PVV was immigration policy, a highly salient issue in Dutch politics since the early 2000s, with the party campaigning in favour of national control over immigration.

Finally, though all parties agreed that democratic control of the European Union should be strengthened, solutions differed. Whereas the Euro-sceptic PVV, SP and to a lesser extent the PvdD and SGP/CU emphasized the need to maintain veto rights and to strengthen the influence of national parliaments in Brussels, the other parties emphasized the need to increase majority decision-making in order to improve the effectiveness of the enlarged EU. All parties except the PVV agreed that the European parliament should have more power in order to improve democratic control.

### **The election campaign**

In general, the election campaign was perceived to be rather boring, with little substantive discussion of issues, – to the public – relatively unknown candidates, and few campaign

<sup>12</sup> The small Christian SGP/ChristenUnie and the Party for the Animals PvdD could be characterized as being moderately Euro-sceptic as well.

<sup>13</sup> Most parties agreed on the need to strengthen European cooperation in order to fight the economic crisis, and all parties, except the SP and PVV, agreed to create European financial oversight for banks. The PVV and SP stressed the need to reduce Dutch unemployment by sending European guest-workers, such as Polish workers, back home and blamed the coalition parties for not using their influence in the – mostly nationalized – banks to limit salaries for top-bankers and to start providing much-needed loans to small entrepreneurs. With respect to environmental policies, even though the Animal rights party (PvdD) and the Green Left (GL) most strongly emphasized the need to invest in sustainable energy to fight global warming and to improve animal welfare, most political parties took similar pro-environmental positions, locating environmental policy as one of the policy areas in which European cooperation is required, with the exception of the PVV, and to a lesser degree the CDA and VVD.

bloopers.<sup>14</sup> Hence, the elections were hardly breaking news in the media.<sup>15</sup> Judging by the main winners in the polls – the Euro-sceptic PVV and Europhile D66, the Dutch electorate seemed to be relatively polarized on European issues. Nonetheless, the attention of the mainstream parties was geared more towards the possible electoral success of the PVV, most likely due to its potential implications for the upcoming national elections in 2011. Moreover, though the policy programmes of the main parties were considerably pro-European integration, in the campaign most parties sought to take a critical stance towards Europe. The European parties NewEuropeans and Libertas were hardly visible in the campaign.

In terms of party competition, according to the polls it seemed that the VVD suffered most from the PVV's electoral success, which it attempted to counter by voicing Eurosceptic rhetoric. The polls showed, however, that the electorate was not easily convinced, probably due to the uneasy coalition with Europhile D66 in the European Liberal Democrats (ELDR) and possibly also to a somewhat clumsy intervention by the VVD leader Mark Rutte in the week before the elections.<sup>16</sup>

The other party suffering large losses in the polls was the PvdA. On the one hand, the party was troubled with competition from D66 and Green Left and, on the other hand, it encountered difficulties in differentiating itself from the CDA, with which it shared many policy stances. Eventually, the PvdA stressed the role of its party leader and minister of Finance, Wouter Bos, in dealing with the economic crisis and attempted to differentiate itself from the CDA by emphasizing the need to abolish subsidies for European farmers. The CDA took a stable position in the centre of the political spectrum, both with respect to European integration and in terms of left-right, which led it to suffer less from competition from the other parties, and to maintain a stable position in the polls as the largest party.

Problematic in the polls was the volatility of the Dutch electorate, which made predictions imprecise, as well as the fact that turnout levels can influence election results strongly in European elections. Both the PVV and SP were expected to suffer from low turnout levels, whereas the CDA and PvdA would benefit from low turnout.

## Results

Despite initial reports on election day of increased turnout, eventually only 36.9% of the Dutch electorate made it to the polls in the 2009 elections (compared to 39.3% in the 2004 European elections). The winner of the elections was the Euro-sceptic PVV, which managed to gain 17% of the votes and entered the European Parliament with 4 seats in its very first European election. However, as predicted by the polls, the Europhile D66 also managed to increase its seat share from 1 to 3 (with 11% of the vote). The Europhile GroenLinks gained seats as well and now has

<sup>14</sup> In terms of candidates, with the exception of prominent VVD MP Hans van Baalen, most candidates were relatively unknown to the public. Nevertheless, the number one party candidates generally did have quite extensive experience in European, national or local politics. In particular, the CDA, PVV and VVD had members of the national parliament as their number one candidates (Wim van de Camp for the CDA, Barry Madlener for the PVV and Hans van Baalen for the VVD) and GroenLinks had its party leader in the municipal council of Amsterdam, Judith Sargentini, as number one candidate. Only two parties decided to have European parliamentarians lead the election campaign: the PvdA with Thijs Berman and D66 with Sophie in 't Veld. Of the 27 members of the European parliament, 15 ran again in the 2009 elections (Source: Parliamentary Documentation Centre, University of Leiden).

<sup>15</sup> This was despite the efforts of most political parties to reach voters through new media. Inspired by the successful Democratic campaign for the US presidential elections, most parties campaigned via the internet, mostly via blogs of the campaign leaders, YouTube, Hyves (the Dutch Facebook) and Twitter. Research by the Dutch newspaper NRC demonstrated that the Christian Democrats seemed to aim at internet most clearly as one of their campaigning media. The progressive liberal D66 and the green Groen Links followed suit in terms of messages via Twitter and YouTube movies, but were relatively less present on Hyves, where the Animal Party got most friends. (Source: NRC 29-5-2009 Wim stijgt met stip, Eurodennis twittert een beetje).

<sup>16</sup> In an attempt to win back defecting voters, VVD leader Rutte presented a "plan for freedom of expression" with an unmistakable anti-Islamic tone, in which he went as far as to claim that denying the holocaust should be accepted as part of freedom of expression. His remark was strongly condemned by politicians and representatives of civil society and as a consequence Rutte had to withdraw his statement.

a total of three seats in the European Parliament. The governing labour party PvdA recorded the greatest loss in the elections, moving from seven to three seats. Its coalition partner CDA suffered more moderate losses (two seats out of seven). The opposition party VVD lost less than predicted in the polls, and was left with 3 seats. The third government party, CU, sharing its list with the SGP, kept the two seats it had won in the 2004 election. The PvdD, despite being represented by two seats in the Dutch National Parliament did not manage to gain any seats in the European Parliament. The European parties Libertas and Newropeans did not win any seats either.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 21-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Netherlands**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Christian Democratic Appeal	CDA	20.05	5	EPP
Party for Freedom	PVV	16.97	4	NA
Labour Party	PvdA	12.05	3	S&D
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	VVD	11.39	3	ALDE
Democrats 66	D66	11.32	3	ALDE
Green Left	GroenLinks	8.87	3	G/EFA
Socialist Party	SP	7.1	2	GUE/NGL
Christian Union – Calvinist Reformed Party	CU-SGP	6.82	2	ECR
Animal Rights Party	PvdD	3.46	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>25</b>	

*Notes:* No election threshold; turnout 36.95%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); NA: Non-attached; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

*Source:* www.kiesraad.nl, 15.06.2009.

Overall, the election resulted in the PVV becoming the second largest Dutch party represented in the European parliament, after the CDA. As in other European countries, the results of the elections have mostly been analyzed as a test of the popularity of the governing parties. Clearly, the Dutch coalition partners did not fare well in the European elections and voters signalled their discontent by supporting the smaller opposition parties. The election results hence illustrate several well-known features of European elections, as their secondary nature tends to lead to lower turnout, and favours smaller opposition parties while punishing governing parties.

Nevertheless, with the elections for the National Parliament coming up in June 2010, these election results can also be read as an opinion poll on the state of national politics in the Netherlands. In this respect, it is questionable to what degree the results, with gains for the Euro-sceptic PVV and Europhile D66 and GroenLinks, indicate a genuine polarization of the Dutch electorate over Europe. Rather, the gain of the PVV might be due to continuing voter dissatisfaction about immigration and the gains of D66 and GroenLinks due to the ongoing declining popularity of the Dutch Labour Party. The forthcoming analyses of voter surveys should shed more light on these dynamics, as will the upcoming national elections.

<sup>17</sup> The Netherlands was criticized in the foreign media for announcing the provisional results of the elections on Election Day, when the majority of European voters still had to go to the polls. The European Commission has announced an investigation into whether the Netherlands breached any rules by doing so, as official election results are only allowed to be published on the Sunday evening after all polling stations in Europe have closed.



## POLAND

*Wojciech Gagatek, Katarzyna Grzybowska-Walecka and Patrycja Rozbicka*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Poland's last (early) general election of October 2007 represented a significant development in Polish politics for at least three major reasons. First of all, its result restated the domination of post-Solidarity centre-right parties and a further marginalization of the left. Since 2005, the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) and the liberal centre-right Civic Platform (PO) have been the strongest and most popular parties, whereas the post-communist left – a strong and united political actor until the early 2000s – have dispersed into two competing alliances (see below). Second, after the well-known fragmentation of the Polish parliament, the number of parties in the lower house, the Sejm, dropped from six in 2005 to four in 2007, thanks to the electoral failure of the populist Self-Defence and the fundamentalist-catholic League of Polish Families (LPR). Finally, this election marked the highest turnout since the first (semi-) free election in 1989 – 53.9%, largely due to wide-ranging popular mobilization against the PiS, Self-Defence and LPR coalition government.

The result of the 2007 General Election saw PO slightly short of an absolute majority and a coalition government was formed with the relatively small agrarian Polish Peasants' Party (PSL). A difficult pattern of cohabitation emerged between the PO-PSL coalition and President Lech Kaczyński (elected in 2005). Not only did this result from the fact that the President is a twin brother of Jarosław Kaczyński, the former Prime Minister and the leader of the main opposition party PiS; but also because he represents a rather different vision of national and EU politics than that held by the government (see the section on issues). In order to highlight his different positions, Lech Kaczyński has not hesitated to use his strong constitutional prerogatives, for example to veto the legislative initiatives of the government, on quite a large number of occasions. Not without importance is the fact that current Prime Minister Donald Tusk (PO) was himself a presidential candidate in 2005 and a candidate of his party is likely to run against Kaczyński in the next presidential election. In such an atmosphere, periods of truce between the two actors are marked by various conflicts, carefully followed by the media, such as the one concerning which of the two politicians should represent Poland at EU summits. The Poles will most likely have to live with this difficult cohabitation until the next presidential election in autumn 2010.

Ten electoral committees registered to run in the nationwide campaign for the European Parliament, which, in comparison with the 21 committees running in the 2004 EP election, could suggest some level of consolidation of the party scene. The divided left registered two electoral committees: the bigger and stronger Democratic Left Alliance and Labour Union (SLD-UP) and the newly created Alliance for the Future – Centre-left (Centrolewica). The Euro-sceptics were represented by the PiS splinter group, The Right of the Republic of Poland (Prawica RP), the ultra-liberal Real Politics Union (UPR), and Libertas, which absorbed politicians from the former LPR and some prominent figures from the national-catholic circles of other right-wing parties.

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## Issues

Although the Poles are generally very pro-European and assess the first five years of Polish membership extremely positively, at the same time they are relatively little informed about either the European elections or the functioning of the Parliament itself. More than 65% of Poles feel that their country is much better off inside the EU than outside, with only 13% believing that there are more disadvantages than advantages to Polish EU membership.<sup>2</sup> Compared to 2004, the number of those opposing Polish membership in the EU has dropped by more than 20 percentage points. At the same time, only 34% of the electorate declared any interest in the campaign, with only 37% willing to cast their votes.<sup>3</sup> This lack of knowledge about the EP elections and the Parliament in general was confirmed in various opinion polls, with only half the citizens consulted in a survey correctly indicating that MEPs are elected by a direct vote.<sup>4</sup>

Given these figures, from the very beginning of the campaign it was clear that it would be mainly a national contest, based on the same issues as in national elections. As mentioned above, since 2005, the main line of political conflict has been between the two right-wing parties, PO and PiS. PO portrayed itself as a moderate, consensual, reliable and predictable actor on the international scene, painting its main competitor in totally opposite terms. On the other hand, the PiS slogan highlighted its aim of putting the Polish interest first by defending it in a strong, fierce and uncompromising manner when needed. PO takes its popular support from the well-educated middle-class liberal urban parts of Polish society (mainly in the West of Poland), whereas PiS portrays itself as a defender of the poorer, less-educated and more traditionally-oriented parts, with a blessing from the ultra fundamentalist-catholic Radio Maryja. Both the previous general elections (2005 and 2007) and the 2009 EP election were fought within these lines of political conflict, with the other parties trying to fit into the bipolar competition between PO and PiS. With regard to so-called European themes, the main questions were who could better defend the Polish interest, what role Poland should play in the EU, how far integration should go, and, quite naturally, whether and when to join the eurozone. The debate therefore ranged from those favouring further political and economic integration (PO and the Left) and those having some doubts (PiS) or totally opposed to this idea (Prawica RP, Libertas, the UPR). The Treaty of Lisbon (at that time still not ratified by the president) played virtually no role in the campaign, except in that of Libertas, which was trying to base its campaign on the issue. The question of defending Polish interests came from different assessments of the role Poland should play in the EU. As far as PiS and the other right-wing parties are concerned, Poland is in many cases still treated as a second-order Member State (e.g. because Polish farmers receive significantly less EU subsidies than those in the West), while PO and the Left oppose this assessment by pointing to the benefits of EU membership. In this context, not only do the main parties differ as to the direction of Polish EU membership, but also as to the means to achieve Poland's aims.

The two left-wing parties (the SLD and the Centre Left) supported strengthening the EU and on the domestic ground declared a fight against social and economic exclusion. The three right-wing Euro-sceptic parties all seemed to present the same profile: Libertas and Prawica RP wanted to promote religious values in the EU, as well as anti-abortion and anti-euthanasia politics. A similar approach was favoured by the UPR, which additionally opposed trends towards the centralization and bureaucratization of EU politics.

### The election campaign

The campaign can be characterised as representing continuity in terms of the means of attracting voters and the main lines of political conflict, but also with a few interesting novelties. The main focus of Polish campaigns in recent years has been on a fight using paid TV adverts as the main weapons. The spin doctors of the two largest parties produce one broadcast after another, often

<sup>2</sup> Bilans pięciu lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej. Komunikat z badań, CBOS BS/64/2009 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K\\_064\\_09.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_064_09.PDF), accessed 20.5.2009.

<sup>3</sup> 'Male zainteresowanie wyborami do PE', *Onet.pl*, 28.5.2009; [http://eurowybory.onet.pl/504,male\\_zainteresowanie\\_wyborami\\_do\\_pe,artykul.html](http://eurowybory.onet.pl/504,male_zainteresowanie_wyborami_do_pe,artykul.html), accessed 29.5.2009.

<sup>4</sup> 'Polacy mało wiedzą o wyborach do PE', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22.04.2009.



in quick reaction to those of their opponents. This fight is so intensive that the two parties have to spend most of their election funds on this purpose. In the EP elections, PiS was clearly trying to frame the campaign as a sanction vote against PO, basing its TV campaign on the need to give the PO's government record a 'yellow card' for its inability to fight the economic crisis and for its failure to realize its pre-election promises. Apart from rebuffing this criticism, PO tried to portray PiS as a marginal player in the European Parliament, unable to exert any influence (see below). The other parties sought to find a place between the two large parties, with rather disappointing results, especially for the post-communist left (SLD). During the 2009 EP campaign, this party ran a negative campaign against the two largest parties, trying to show their incompetency at the international level and their lack of ability to cooperate in the name of Polish interests. However, due to the fact that, unlike most EU member states, Poland is divided into 13 constituencies, the other, important arena of political competition took place at the regional level, where the main means of attracting voters is posting large-format election billboards and producing leaflets, and promotional gifts etc. As in all the other countries, however, the main difference between national and EP campaigns is that the latter receive much less funding. The maximum level set by the National Electoral Commission for a single electoral committee amounted to little more than 10.3 million PLN (roughly 2.3 million euros), which is roughly a third of the maximum national levels.<sup>5</sup> Compared to the 2004 EP elections, almost all the committees increased their funds for this campaign, in most cases almost reaching the legal limit.<sup>6</sup> In sum, it could be said that the 2009 EP campaign was a repetition of the 2007 national campaign, however with a much lower profile.

Among a number of novelties, three require particular attention. To start with the most obvious one, this campaign saw an unprecedented use of Internet campaigning. Whereas in the previous EP campaign the Internet was only present incidentally, this time some of the candidates centred their campaign on this means of attracting voters. This was the case with a relatively unknown candidate from Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, who, thanks to the support of his celebrity friends and a well-thought out campaign on the Internet (using YouTube, Facebook, etc.), had a good result and was elected. Secondly, Polish public TV indirectly supported the Polish branch of Libertas. The reason for this unfair treatment was that the managing director of the public TV, nominated a few months before the campaign, was formerly a politician close to Libertas. As the election results show, this support did not help Libertas, but as a side-effect it definitely helped raise awareness of European political parties. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that at the end of April PO organized the election congress of the European People's Party (EPP) in Warsaw, and it used this event to show the electorate how many and how strong its political friends in Europe are. Throughout the entire campaign, the governing party made the case that its membership of the largest European political party ensures that the Polish voice is heard and taken into account. Thanks to this – PO argued – the former Polish Prime Minister and MEP since 2004 Jerzy Buzek should be considered a strong contender for the presidency of the Parliament, and by voting for PO one was increasing his chances of being formally nominated. In every single TV advert, it highlighted this fact, also by pointing out that its main opponent PiS belongs to a small party group in the EP, thus being marginalized. When PiS backfired at the end of the campaign by announcing its new European alliance with the British Conservatives and Czech ODS, PO replied that they would still be quite a small group in the EP, and, even more importantly, that the British Conservatives wanted to scrap subsidies for Polish farmers. More importantly from the point of view of the campaign, as in 2005 PiS highlighted the case of a figure who is very unpopular and well-known in Poland, Erika Steinbach. This CDU politician is president of the Federation of Expellees, an organisation of Germans who were expelled from the former German regions which since the war belong to

<sup>5</sup> Komunikat Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 21 kwietnia 2009 r. w sprawie podwyższenia limitu wydatków komitetu wyborczego w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego, ZKF-903-1/09, [http://www.pkw.gov.pl/pkw2/index.jsp?place=Lead07&news\\_cat\\_id=22528&news\\_id=41772&layout=1&page=text](http://www.pkw.gov.pl/pkw2/index.jsp?place=Lead07&news_cat_id=22528&news_id=41772&layout=1&page=text), accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are as follows (in millions of PLN): PO – 9.5 (3.68 in 2004); PiS – 10 (5.4 in 2004); SLD-UP – 5.6 (8.24 in 2004); PSL – 9 (1.5 in 2004). Source: <http://www.money.pl/archiwum/wiadomosci/artykul/europosel%3Bpsl%3Bdziewiec%3Brazy%3Bdrozszy%3Bniz%3Bw%3Bpo,26,0,458010.html>, accessed 10.6.2009.

Poland. Towards the end of the campaign, the German CDU issued a declaration supporting their claims which received all-embracing negative reactions in Poland. PiS used this argument to make the case that the PO belongs in the EPP together with the CDU; that Prime Minister Donald Tusk is a party colleague of Erika Steinbach, and hence PO is subjected to the CDU and Steinbach's beliefs. All in all, thanks to this debate, awareness of the existence of European political parties in Poland has grown. Finally, much as the campaign in 2004 was to some extent characterised by the candidacy of various celebrities, this campaign featured among the candidates various well-known political mavericks, sometimes with a strong stature in national politics.

From the very beginning of the campaign, the opinion polls predicted a great victory for PO. In various opinion polls conducted in April, it scored between 46 and 58% of the votes, with PiS lagging far behind (21-26%), followed by the SLD (7-10%) and the PSL (6-8%). As the campaign proceeded, PO lost part of its support, though never going below 47%.<sup>7</sup> This was the first time since the birth of democracy in 1989 that a government has maintained such popular support in terms of both quantity and time. While 51% of citizens did not believe that government activities were leading Poland out of crisis, the overall tendency showed its relatively high ratings (42% of citizens supported the government against 28% opposing it).<sup>8</sup>

## Results

Only four electoral committees passed the 5% threshold and will have their MEPs in the European Parliament of 2009-2014. PO and PiS doubled their gains in comparison to the last European elections, whereas the SLD and PSL remained at a comparable level. Therefore, the elections further legitimized the two centre-right parties dominating Polish politics. PiS mobilized its core electorate with its support from Radio Maryja, distancing its two other right-wing opponents, Prawica RP and Libertas, whereas the SLD-UP won the fight for domination on the left, with Centrolewica failing to pass the threshold. Interestingly, despite a strong presence in the public media, not only did Libertas receive a dismal 1.1% of the vote, but it also failed to beat the other right-wing Euro-sceptics, Prawica RP. Finally, the election result unearthed an internal conflict within PiS, with some of its major politicians openly criticizing the party leadership for an ineffective campaign.

PO's victory was not a surprise: it managed to confirm its leading position on the national scene, with 44.43% of popular support, leaving PiS far behind with 27.4% (see table below for details). However, in the light of the worsening economic situation and some unpopular reforms introduced by the government, the scale of the victory may seem surprising. By way of a brief explanation, it seems that the first reason for this result is that PO's competitors could not offer anything particularly attractive to voters. The Poles still have memories of a very unpopular coalition between PiS and Self-Defence and LPR (2005-2007), which led to a very conflictive political atmosphere. Against this picture they can now witness a PO-PSL government which, although often criticized for not undertaking any structural reforms, governs more or less steadily and predictably. This is why Poles did not listen to PiS, which based its TV campaign on the slogan "give PO a yellow card". Besides, from the point of view of this EP election, a moderate level of Euro-scepticism played some role in building its identity, but it was not a cornerstone.

With regard to the SLD-UP, although they did better than expected in the opinion polls, for the last months they concentrated on internal fighting and could not define their role as the opposition. In this situation, PO could use the popularity of its leader, Prime Minister Donald Tusk, present a strong list of candidates, with the particularly popular Jerzy Buzek and EU commissioner Danuta Hubner, and finally, play on the factor of PiS's marginal role in European party politics.

<sup>7</sup> <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/Wiadomosci/0,98461.html>, accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>8</sup> Stosunek do rządu w maju. Komunikat z badań, CBOS BS/76/2009, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K\\_076\\_09.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_076_09.PDF), accessed 1.7.2009.

**Table 22-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Poland**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Civic Platform	PO	44.43	25	EPP
Law and Justice	PiS	27.40	15	ECR
Democratic Left Alliance – Union for Labour	SLD-UP	12.34	7	S&D
Polish People's Party	PSL	7.01	3	EPP
Alliance for the Future – Centre Left	PdP-CentroLewica	2.44	0	-
The Right of the Republic of Poland	Prawica RP	1.95	0	-
Libertas	Libertas	1.14	0	-
Union for Realistic Politics	UPR	1.10	0	-
Polish Labour Party	PPP	0.7	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>50</b>	

*Notes:* Election Threshold 5%; Turnout 24.53%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

*Source:* National Electoral Commission, <http://pe2009.pkw.gov.pl/PUE/PL/WYN/M/index.htm>.

With an anticipated low turnout of 24.53% (compared to 21% in 2004), politicians and academics opened a discussion about the reason for such low democratic participation. On the one hand, Poles are not particularly keen on using their vote in any type of elections, as shown by the statistics of the last 20 years of independent statehood. From this point of view, a comparatively low turnout is a defining feature of Polish politics. On the other hand, a much lower level of turnout in the European Parliament elections is explained in the same way as in other countries: dull campaigns, failure to mobilize voters, a lack of understanding of the European Parliament, etc. From this point of view, unless parties change their campaign styles and mobilize the voters, Poland will continue to score Europe's lowest levels of democratic participation in the future.



## 23

## PORTUGAL

José Santana Pereira<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Portugal has been a democracy since 1974 and a Member State of the European Union since 1986. Nowadays, the head of State is Cavaco Silva, a former Prime Minister, who was appointed president of the Republic after winning the presidential elections of 2006. Having a semi-presidential system, the country is governed by the Prime Minister José Sócrates, leader of the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista*; PS<sup>2</sup>), which obtained a majority of the parliamentary seats in the 2005 legislative elections. This was the first time that PS – a centre-left party – had an absolute majority of seats in Parliament since the first post-authoritarian elections in 1975, an achievement probably explained by the wish of the Portuguese to have a stable government after two dramatic dissolutions of Parliament (2001 and 2004). In the legislative election of September 2009, the Socialist Party again managed to win, but without a majority of seats in Parliament. Sócrates decided to stand alone and form a minority government.

The major opposition party, the centre-right Social Democrat Party (*Partido Social Democrata*, PSD) had had a hard time in the previous four years, occasioning several changes of leadership. The other political parties present in the national and European Parliaments are, to the left of the PS, the Left Block (*Bloco de Esquerda*, BE) and the Unitary Democratic Coalition (*Coligação Democrática Unitária*, CDU). The BE is a new left-wing political group, whose recent electoral growth has been fast and quite surprising considering the mainly bipartisan character of the Portuguese party system since 1987. The CDU, in turn, is an electoral coalition between the communists and the greens, and represents the traditional left-wing ideological stances. To the right of the PSD, there is the Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (*Centro Democrático Social-Partido Popular*, CDS-PP), a Christian-Democrat party.

The general political landscape of Portugal is, thus, composed of these four parties and one coalition. In the last year, two new political parties have emerged on the Portuguese landscape – the Merit and Society Movement (MMS), a liberal party based on the ideals of meritocracy and freedom, and the Hope for Portugal Movement (Movimento Esperança Portugal; MEP), ideologically at the centre of the political spectrum. The main objective of these parties is to achieve representation in the national and/or European Parliament, replicating the BE phenomenon of ten years before.<sup>3</sup> There are also some small parties which have never won representation in the national or European Parliament, and whose vote shares in general elections are frequently

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<sup>2</sup> The Socialist Party is not actually a socialist party in ideological terms, but instead a social democratic party. Its misleading name derives from a leftist bias during the formation of most of the political parties in Portugal after the revolution of 1974. The same bias is present in the name of the Social Democrat Party (a liberal party, in ideological terms) and Social Democratic Centre – Popular Party (a Christian-democrat party).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the interview given by Rui Marques, leader of MEP, to the weekly newspaper *Expresso* (13.06.2009). The article is entitled “MEP quer ser um novo Bloco de Esquerda” (MEP wants to be a new Left Block).

below 1%. Therefore, of the thirteen political parties which registered their candidates for the 2009 European Election at the Constitutional Court, only five already have elected European representatives; and, due to the reduction in seats for Portuguese representatives (from 24 to 22) it was highly unlikely that the small parties would get a seat this time either.<sup>4</sup>

### Issues

For the Portuguese political parties, the year 2009 was full of electoral battles. After a quiet period of two years without national-level elections or referenda, the Portuguese have been called to the polls on three occasions – the European election, the legislative election and the local elections. The campaign for the European election, which started officially in the last weeks of May, inaugurated this year of political battles.

In Portugal, the image of the European Union is positive amongst the majority of the citizens. Several Eurobarometer surveys show that the Portuguese are aware of the benefits of membership of the European Union over the last 20 years and trust European institutions. The last two waves of this survey (Spring and Autumn of 2008) showed that the Euro-enthusiasm of the Portuguese had dropped a little, but this was generally explained by a short-term tendency of pessimism caused by the climate of economic crisis.<sup>5</sup> The political parties tend to reproduce this panorama. The positions of the Portuguese parties seem to be consistent with an inverted U-shape relationship between the electoral size of the parties and their support for the European Union – the parties with small vote shares (i.e. those on the extreme left or extreme right of the ideological spectrum) share a higher degree of Euro-scepticism; although for quite different reasons,<sup>6</sup> while the bigger parties (in the middle) are generally more supportive of European integration. In fact, it is only possible to talk of moderate Euro-scepticism in the case of the CDS-PP, BE and CDU – none of these parties contend that Portugal should exit the European Union. Such claims come from very small parties at the extreme left and extreme right of the ideological spectrum.

The five political forces already present in the European Parliament produced and presented manifestos (or manifesto-like programme documents) for the 2009 elections at different points in the campaign – the BE was the first party to present their programme and the right-wing parties were the last. The PS, for instance, started by publishing a translation of the manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (and then presented an improved version with a few references to the Portuguese context), whereas the other parties decided to write their own documents.

On the left of the political spectrum, the manifestos from the CDU,<sup>7</sup> PS<sup>8</sup> and BE<sup>9</sup> shared a preoccupation with the crisis and proposals for ways to deal with it, as well as the promotion of job creation, defence of the environment, and the protection of the rights of workers (the PS calls it the creation of a new Social Europe). The BE and PS wanted a new form of regulation of the financial system in order to prevent a new crisis, whereas the CDU focused essentially on the promotion of national productive enterprises and the defence of public services. The CDU and BE rejected the Treaty of Lisbon and argued that the European Union should foster peace and democracy in the world without using military/offensive mechanisms, whereas the PS is in favour of the Treaty and of deepening the role of Europe in the World through the use

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the post “Ao Rui Marques e à Laurinda Alves” (To Rui Marques and Laurinda Alves, leader and first candidate of the Hope for Portugal Movement) published 11.02.2009 on the blog *Tempo Político* by the political scientist Marina Costa Lobo, <http://tempo-politico.blogspot.com/2009/02/ao-rui-marques-e-laurinda-alves.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See the Eurobarometer National Reports for Portugal, waves 69 and 70, at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/standard\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm).

<sup>6</sup> M. C. Lobo, ‘A União Europeia e os partidos políticos portugueses: da consolidação à qualidade democrática’, in M. C. Lobo and P. Lains (eds.), *Em nome da Europa. Portugal em Mudança (1986-2006)*, Principia, Estoril, 2007, pp. 78-96.

<sup>7</sup> The manifesto, signed by the communist party, is downloadable, in Portuguese, from the website [http://www.cdu.pt/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=279&Itemid=66](http://www.cdu.pt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=279&Itemid=66), accessed 14.6.2009.

<sup>8</sup> See the PS manifesto at [http://www.ps.pt/media/manifesto\\_europeias\\_09.pdf](http://www.ps.pt/media/manifesto_europeias_09.pdf), accessed 14.6.2009.

<sup>9</sup> BE decided not to present a manifesto to the European elections, but only an electoral compromise, available at [http://www.bloco.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1594&Itemid=1](http://www.bloco.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1594&Itemid=1), accessed 14.6.2009.

of the Union's civil and military capacities. The CDU stood against all forms of discrimination, whereas the PS just mentioned its aim of fostering gender equality; the former was against measures that conflict with national sovereignty whereas the latter was in favour of common policies in the areas of energy, the seas, agriculture, fisheries, regional development, security, justice and immigration. In fact, “more Europe” or “stronger Europe” were catch phrases used in the PS outdoor campaign.<sup>10</sup> The CDU also stressed the importance of defending and promoting the Portuguese language and culture within and beyond the national borders.

On the right, the CDS-PP<sup>11</sup> put the stress on the role of Europe in the World and the strengthening of strategic relationships with other countries and regions. It defended the value of freedom in the economy (whereas the BE clearly fights neo-liberalism and blamed it for the crisis). This party was favourable towards the Treaty of Lisbon, but contended that any treaty challenging national sovereignty should be submitted to a referendum. The document drawn up is not very complex in terms of policy proposals, and, as with the CDU manifesto, dedicated a great deal of space to criticizing the government.

Lastly, the PSD decided not to present a manifesto, but instead a “European contract” between the candidates and their voters.<sup>12</sup> This contract metaphor was also present in the party slogans and outdoor campaign.<sup>13</sup> In terms of issues, the document includes the creation of jobs and wealth, the representation of national interests (which approximates it to the CDS-PP and CDU), the defence of the Treaty of Lisbon, the promotion of Portuguese as an official European language, deeper integration in the areas of security and justice, and the priority of environment and energy issues. The original touch in this document is the idea of putting young people at the front of European construction.

### The election campaign

The campaign for the European election officially started on 25 May, two weeks before polling day.<sup>14</sup> However, the unofficial campaign had already started some time previously. In the case of the PS, the first candidate, Vital Moreira, was announced to the country at the end of February. This professor of Law and former communist militant defines himself as a “freelance socialist”,<sup>15</sup> having won notoriety as an opinion maker in newspapers such as *Público* and *Diário Económico*. The PSD took more time to choose a candidate to head its European election list; the leader of the PSD group in the national parliament, Paulo Rangel, was appointed as first candidate in mid-April. Rangel was not the natural candidate and his appointment occasioned more waves of criticism towards the leader. As for the CDU and BE, both decided to re-candidate previous members of the European Parliament at the top of their lists: Ilda Figueiredo and Miguel Portas, respectively. In addition, both parties injected new blood into the campaign (and the European Parliament) by including candidates under 35 years old and unknown to the general public in second position: João Ferreira and Marisa Matias. The CDS-PP decided on new candidates, Nuno Melo and Diogo Feio, at the top of its list.

During the campaign, European issues were almost forgotten in the pages of the electoral manifestos. Themes such as the construction of Europe, European institutions, or the future constitution (or constitutional treaty) were not dealt with by the Portuguese candidates during the campaign – according to some observers, because neither the politicians nor the population were really interested in debating Europe. Instead, national problems such as the consequences of the economic crisis or the construction of infrastructure (airports, high-speed railways)

<sup>10</sup> See the PS outdoor campaign for the European election campaign of 2009 at [http://www.ps.pt/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=75&Itemid=89&limit=4&limitstart=0](http://www.ps.pt/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=75&Itemid=89&limit=4&limitstart=0)

<sup>11</sup> See the CDS-PP manifesto at [http://www.cds.pt/rubricas.aspx?id\\_seccao=41&id\\_rubrica=2146&ord=2](http://www.cds.pt/rubricas.aspx?id_seccao=41&id_rubrica=2146&ord=2), accessed 14.6.2009.

<sup>12</sup> This document is available at <http://www.politicaeverdade.com/?idc=902>, accessed 14.6.2009.

<sup>13</sup> See the PSD outdoor campaign at <http://www.politicaeverdade.com/?idc=909>.

<sup>14</sup> See the election laws at the National Election Commission (CNE) website – [www.cne.pt](http://www.cne.pt).

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the article published at the time of the announcement of Vital Moreira as first candidate in the PS list by *Jornal de Notícias* online (28.2.2009), [http://jn.sapo.pt/PaginaInicial/Interior.aspx?content\\_id=1156934](http://jn.sapo.pt/PaginaInicial/Interior.aspx?content_id=1156934).

were at the top of the list of issues debated. The least brilliant issue proposals both came from Vital Moreira. First, the PS candidate tried to involve the PSD in a financial scandal involving the bank BPN,<sup>16</sup> which was not seen as at all appropriate by public opinion and led him to lose the support of some top members of the PS; then he brought to the debate the issue of creating a European tax, without being able to either explain it or justify it to the voters.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of campaign costs, data on campaign budgets<sup>18</sup> show that the PSD was the party expected to spend the greatest amount of money (more than two million euros), whereas the CDS-PP decided to drastically reduce its campaign expenditure (and kept mentioning it during the campaign),<sup>19</sup> presenting a budget of around half a million euros – under a tenth of the budget for the 2005 legislative elections. The PSD and PS expected to spend about a third of the value of their campaign budgets of 2005, but the CDU planned to spend almost half a million euro more in the European elections than in the last general election. The BE decided to spend exactly the same amount of money – around 730,000 euros – in both elections.

What was this money spent on? All parties invested in the construction of websites designed specifically for the European election campaign, as well as in outdoor campaigning. Public sessions, debates, visits to important towns throughout the country and street campaigning were part of the daily lives of the most prominent candidates. As for television, all the networks broadcast campaign materials in a space entitled *Tempo de Antena* (Air Time) immediately before the evening news broadcasts. In addition, debates between the top candidates of the most relevant Portuguese parties were organized by television networks in April (SIC) and May (TVI, RTP). Detaching himself from traditional campaign tactics, Vital Moreira created a space on Twitter and published a book entitled *Nós Europeus* (Us, the Europeans; the national slogan of the PS campaign), in which he collected texts on European politics published as *chroniques* in newspapers.

The first opinion polls, conducted in April, predicted a technical tie between the PS and PSD; during the month of May, the PS seemed to distance itself from its closer competitor, but this advantage varied drastically over the following weeks. The only poll that gave a victory to the PSD, instead of the PS, was conducted by Marktest in late May. The CDU and BE were in direct competition for third place, and the CDS-PP was running fifth.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly enough, in these elections polling was a campaign issue for some of the participants. The polls from CESOP predicted the disappearance of the CDS-PP from the European Parliament, which caused wild criticism from this party's representatives and much discussion in newspapers, on television and on the internet.<sup>21</sup>

## Results

In 7 June 2009, just 36.78% of the voters went to the polls to express their preferences for the composition of the Portuguese group of Members of the European Parliament. This is the second lowest turnout in the history of European elections in Portugal (after the 35.54 % turnout in 1994), but represents a very small decrease from the turnout observed in 2004, which means that the trend of low participation in European elections is not changing dramatically. Abstention, however, was a major issue in the analysis of the election results,<sup>22</sup> and the president

<sup>16</sup> See several texts published in the news magazine *Visão*, 11.6.2009.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the article “Vital Moreira propõe criação de imposto europeu” (Vital Moreira proposes European tax), in the newspaper *Público* online, 26.5.2009, available at <http://ultimahora.publico.clix.pt/noticia.aspx?id=1383137>.

<sup>18</sup> Information available at the Entity for Party Finances of the Constitutional Court (<http://www.tribunalconstitucional.pt/tc/contas03220203.html>).

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, the article “A mini máquina de campanha do CDS-PP” (The mini campaign machine of CDS-PP) on the news website *Portugal Diário*, 3.6.2009, <http://diario.iol.pt/politica/cds-campanha-europeias-eleicoes-tvi24-ultimas-noticias/1068004-4072.html>.

<sup>20</sup> All the polls are summarized in the May 31 and June 5 posts of the blog *Margens de Erro*, by the political scientist Pedro Magalhães, at [www.margensdeerro.blogspot.com](http://www.margensdeerro.blogspot.com).

<sup>21</sup> For a good summary of the exchange of arguments about the CDS-PP results on the CESOP polls, see the May and June 2009 posts of the blog *Margens de Erro* – at [www.margensdeerro.blogspot.com](http://www.margensdeerro.blogspot.com).

<sup>22</sup> See several texts published in the news magazine *Visão*, 11.06.2009.



of the Republic expressed his concern and disappointment over this sign of disinterest and abdication of political responsibility by the citizens.<sup>23</sup>

The winner of these elections was the PSD, with about 32% of the votes (almost 1.13 million ballots) and eight representatives elected. The leader of this party, and the first candidate Paulo Rangel, claimed it as a sign that the Portuguese have a desire for change after four years of socialist government. Considering the polls, these results were highly unexpected, and allowed Manuela Ferreira Leite – who had chosen the first candidate personally and against the advice of important party members – to strengthen her leadership and the probability of winning the legislative elections next September.

The incumbent PS suffered the worst defeat on the night of 7 June. A defeat in these second-order elections is, probably, the most natural outcome for a party that has been in government for four years. On the one hand, the second-order character of the elections, and the fact that some of the polls had indicated a PS victory, might have strengthened abstentionism among this party's supporters. In fact, during the campaign, both Vital Moreira and José Socrates (leader of the PS) affirmed that abstention was their biggest enemy,<sup>24</sup> a perception which would prove to be absolutely accurate. On the other hand, the fact that the PS had been an incumbent party for four years might have led to a vote of protest in favour of the small left-wing parties. The fact that, in the legislative elections of September, the PS won without maintaining its majority of seats in Parliament also indicates some kind of erosion in the relationship between this party and its 2005 voters.

**Table 23-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Portugal**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Social Democrat Party	PSD	31.71	8	EPP
Socialist Party	PS	26.58	7	S&D
Left Block	BE	10.73	3	GUE/NGL
Unitary Democratic Coalition*	CDU	10.66	2	GUE/NGL
Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party	CDS-PP	8.37	2	EPP
Hope for Portugal Movement	MEP	1.48	0	-
Communist Party of Portuguese Workers – Reorganizational Movement of the Proletariat Party	PCTP-MRPP	1.21	0	-
Earth Party**	MPT	0.66	0	-
Merit and Society Movement	MMS	0.61	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>22</b>	

Notes: No election threshold; Turnout 36.78%.

\* This coalition is composed of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Ecologist Party “The Greens” (PEV)

\*\* This party has a formal connection with *Libertas*.

Abbreviations: EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left.

Source: Ministry of Justice (<http://www.europeias2009.mj.pt>)

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, the article “Cavaco Silva critica a abstenção nas eleições europeias” (Cavaco Silva criticizes abstention in the European elections), published in *Jornal de Notícias* online, 10.06.2009, available at [http://jn.sapo.pt/PaginaInicial/Nacional/Interior.aspx?content\\_id=1259490](http://jn.sapo.pt/PaginaInicial/Nacional/Interior.aspx?content_id=1259490).

<sup>24</sup> See the PS website.

For the smaller parties with parliamentary representation, the results were also quite satisfactory. The CDU and CDS-PP obtained about 11 and 8% of the vote share respectively. These results assured them the two seats each in the European Parliament that they had won in the previous elections, despite the reduction in the number of seats for Portuguese representatives (which meant that each seat cost more votes, in the words of the CDS-PP candidate Nuno Melo).<sup>25</sup> For the BE, however, the results were much more impressive, representing a spectacular growth by this party. In 2004, only one BE candidate, Miguel Portas, was elected (having collected around 167,000 votes, less than 5% of the total), but in this election the BE managed to more than double its vote share and elect three representatives. The BE was, in June, the political force with the third highest number of votes in Portugal.

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<sup>25</sup> Declarations made during the election night. See [www.rtp.pt](http://www.rtp.pt).

## 24

## ROMANIA

*Arpad Todor*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The 2009 Romanian election for the European Parliament followed the November 2008 Parliamentary election, which brought into government a ‘grand coalition’ of the largest two Romanian political parties, the centre-right Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L) and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (PSD), together controlling roughly 70% of the seats in Parliament. Although both parties are rooted in the ‘ex-communist’ National Salvation Front, their alliance was previously unlikely, given their fierce competition in recent years.

This alliance came after the maintenance of an ultra-minority centre-right government of the National Liberal Party (PNL) from 2006 to 2008 with only 19% of the seats in Parliament, but with the implicit support of the PSD, a support justified by the need to contain President Traian Băsescu’s capacity to influence the government. This situation led to weakening financial discipline, which culminated in a 5.5% budget deficit for 2008, a situation that, combined with the advent of an international economic crisis in the autumn of 2008, switched the national mood from optimism to overall panic. The fall from an 8% increase in GDP in 2008 to a predicted 4%-9% economic decline in 2009 cast a shadow of uncertainty over virtually the whole economy.

Another significant aspect of the 2008 Parliamentary election was the result of a new electoral law, which, despite maintaining overall proportional representation (with a 5% party threshold), introduced single-seat electoral college. The law aimed to provide a cure for the ever decreasing trust in political parties and politicians in general, and for the decreasing rates of political participation, by allowing citizens to elect a person and not a list. One of the first successes of the new law was that two nationalist parties, the Greater Romania Party and the New Generation Party – Christian Democratic, parties that were constructed around a leader, failed to enter Parliament. Instead, the EP elections took place under a law that provides for national-level party block lists, thus offering total discretion to the party leadership in choosing eligible candidates.

### Issues

Despite being an EU member since 2007, the maintenance of the European Commission’s monitoring regarding the issues of Justice Reform and anti-corruption, and the permanent negative reporting on Romanian immigrants in the European mass-media, particularly in Italy, has kept Romania in a ‘second order membership of the EU’ status. Nevertheless, since Romania is a country where even the nationalist Greater Romania Party is pro-EU integration, no major themes of debate related to the EU were likely to emerge. As Romanians were among the most pro-EU at the moment of integration, and the EU was perceived as being ‘good for all’ the problems in Romanian society, even though the post-accession period brought some disappointments, they did not significantly decrease the level of trust in the EU.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 68% of the total population. See A. Lungu, ‘Romanii: ingrijorati de preturi, nu au incredere in Justitie, au incredere

In fact, the single most important failed promise regarding EU accession, namely the low level of absorption of EU funds, is an issue that relates to the capacity of the Romanian authorities to realize the necessary reforms to smooth the process. Besides this incapacity, given the increased budgetary deficit at the beginning of 2009, and with a negotiation for a 20 billion euros loan from the IMF and the European Commission, EU funds have been advertised by several politicians as a partial solution to Romania's recession.

The 2009 EP campaign represented the unofficial start of the December 2009 Presidential elections. Given that the three main candidates were known and that events of the last 5 years had underlined that winning the Presidency is a must for any party aiming to nominate the Prime-Minister, the three most important Romanian parties were compelled to advertise their presidential candidates during this election. While the Romanian presidency does not have much executive power, its constitutional role of nominating the Prime-Minister gives it a fundamental edge over the Parliament after Parliamentary Elections. Just as the current President and PD-L candidate went on various highly publicized visits during the electoral campaign, Mircea Geoana from the PSD and Crin Antonescu from the PNL, the other future presidential candidates, appear to have been the main figures in their parties' electoral campaigns. In fact, not only was Crin Antonescu launched as the PNL's presidential candidate on 9 May, two days after the start of the EP campaign, but he was also the central figure on all the PNL's electoral posters and banners.<sup>3</sup>

While various media reports on the forthcoming EP Elections underlined the importance of a Romanian presence in the EU debate and decisional forum, virtually all the reports stressed the lack of interest on the part of the Romanian public and politicians. In fact, interest in these elections was even lower among the political parties, since none of the relevant parties had proposed an electoral platform by the time the electoral campaign started. While PD-L proposed no new manifesto at all, using its government program as its main political platform, the PSD/PC alliance and PNL proposed specific election platforms but with limited relevance to Romania's situation in the EU. For example, the PSD/PC *Political offer for the European Elections*<sup>4</sup> stressed an economic re-launch, access to high-quality medical and educational services, modernization of Romanian agriculture and rural areas, and full rights for Romanians within the EU. While the first three points are not directly related to the EU, the last one was accompanied by no specific policy prescriptions.

The *Liberal Europe Platform*<sup>5</sup> proposed by the PNL instead stressed energy policy, environmental protection, the utilization of EU funds, health issues and EU budgetary reform. Moreover, for most of these points the exact actions and policies that would be proposed by the PNL's euro-parliamentarians were presented.

While not directly related to the EU or any other significant policy issues, two events significantly influenced the unfolding of the electoral campaign and the final results. On the one hand, one of the biggest scandals of the beginning of 2009, namely the arrest on a charge of kidnapping of Gigi Becali, the vocal president of the populist PNG-CD, led to it forming an alliance with the president of the other significant populist-extremist party, the Greater Romanian Party (PRM). Given that his arrest appeared to be a political vendetta, Becali actually benefited from huge support on behalf of the mass-media and part of the Romanian public. Thus, while under arrest, Becali received an offer from the President of the PRM to be presented as the second on the PRM list of candidates for the EP elections.

On the other hand, the decision of the Romanian President's daughter to run on the list of PD-L and the support she received from PD-L generated a scandal that had unintended

in UE, EurActiv, 31.1.2008, [http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles|displayArticle/articleID\\_12411/Romanii-ingrijorati-de-preturi-nu-au-incredere-in-Justitie-au-incredere-in-UE.html](http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles|displayArticle/articleID_12411/Romanii-ingrijorati-de-preturi-nu-au-incredere-in-Justitie-au-incredere-in-UE.html), accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>3</sup> L. Gheorghiu and D. Duca, 'Crin Antonescu, desemnat oficial candidat la preşedinţie din partea PNL', *Cotidianul*, 9.5.2009, [http://www.cotidianul.ro/crin\\_antonescu\\_desemnat\\_oficial\\_candidat\\_la\\_presedintie\\_din\\_partea\\_pnl\\_video-83788.html](http://www.cotidianul.ro/crin_antonescu_desemnat_oficial_candidat_la_presedintie_din_partea_pnl_video-83788.html), accessed 10.6.2009. Traian Băsescu was re-elected as Romania's president.

<sup>4</sup> <http://europene2009.psd.ro/oferta.pdf>, accessed 10.6.2009.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pnl.ro/PlatformaEuropaliberala.html>, accessed 10.6.2009.

consequences. As this proposal triggered significant negative media coverage, Elena Basescu decided to run for the EP as an independent instead. While her famous grammatical errors and Paris Hilton-style<sup>6</sup> image did not offer very much leverage as a political representative, her decision to run as an independent brought her a positive image. Nevertheless, she probably would not have passed the electoral threshold without the full logistic, financial and political support from the PD-L, support that was acknowledged by the party after the elections.

### The election campaign

While the issues related to the current economic crisis dominated the political discourse, such as maintaining jobs, increasing pay and pensions, houses for the young and other social categories, the big European issues like the Common Agricultural Policy, food safety, EU enlargement, subventions and structural funds were absent. An illustrative example can be drawn from an analysis of the electoral broadcasts used by the political parties, since they can be considered a measure of their core campaign messages. To start with, the PSD used a message emphasizing purity,<sup>7</sup> despite its image as the most corrupt Romanian party. Its electoral broadcast featured a child dressed in white holding three roses against a background of “Ode to Joy” and ending with the slogan “Think about who you are voting for! Choose the future!” No specific mention of the programme or candidates was included in the broadcast. In a similar vein, the PD-Ls advert used the slogan “Together in good and bad times” and featured the first candidate on its list, Theodor Stolojan, as the candidate preoccupied by the bad situation of the population, trying to imply an image of the PD-L as the only party which was together with the population in that bad moment of economic crisis.

In contrast to the governing parties, the electoral broadcast used by the PNL aimed to criticize the electoral promises made by the PD-L and PSD during the previous parliamentary elections and finished with the message “How many of the electoral promises have been fulfilled? None! Do not listen to their promises anymore! Show them they are wrong!” A second clip, using a melody of a famous hip-hop band, and circulated exclusively on the internet, contained an acid critique of the economic misperformance of the ‘brown alliance’ (PD-L and PSD). All in all, none of the broadcasts of the three main political parties made any significant reference to the meaning of the EP elections, the parties’ platforms or European themes.

Instead, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) focused on proposing itself as a representative of Transylvania (where most of the Hungarian minority is located) in Brussels, and emphasized messages of solidarity and reconciliation: they placed László Tőkés near the top of their list (2<sup>nd</sup> position). He is a previous leader of the UDMR, who ran as an independent and entered the EP in 2007 with a much more aggressive message than UDMR. Thus, the broadcast concludes with the slogan “Vote the list of solidarity! Vote the UDMR list.” Predictably, the Greater Romania Party, hosting the well-known Gigi Becalon in second place on its list, continued with its previous type of slogans, this time using “Two Christians and patriots will free Romania from thieves!”

Besides the interests of political parties, the strong orientation of the mass-media toward the intense verbal disputes between the candidates for presidential office pushed any substantial debate among the EP candidates into the shadows. For example, the main point of attack on behalf of Crin Antonescu, the PNLs nominee, focused on the incompetence of the current President, the government and Elena Basescu, the false independent candidate for the EP.

In fact, the single most important electoral confrontation reported in the Romanian mass-media concerned the vote in the German Bundestag requesting a stop to EU funds for Romania given the lack of progress on justice reform and the high level of corruption. While the ex-Minister of Justice, Monica Macovei (2nd position on the PD-L list), asserted that Romania

<sup>6</sup> D.Lazar, “‘Le Monde’: Elena Basescu, Paris Hilton a României”, 12.6.2009, [http://www.cotidianul.ro/le\\_monde\\_elena\\_basescu\\_paris\\_hilton\\_a\\_romaniei-87949.html](http://www.cotidianul.ro/le_monde_elena_basescu_paris_hilton_a_romaniei-87949.html), accessed 14.6.2009.

<sup>7</sup> News in ‘Măsurile sociale și prezidențialele, melodiile preferate de campanie pentru PE: Partidele politice au picat la testul european’, <http://www.newsfm.ro/index.php?id=72818>, accessed 14.6.2009.

should receive EU funds only if they can be spent in a transparent manner, the PSD's President accused Monica Macovei in particular, and the PD-L and the European right in general, of working against the Romanian interest.<sup>8</sup>

Related to the first dispute, another confrontation that received attention involved the first on the PSD list, Adrian Severin, and the number two on the PD-L list, Monica Macovei (ex-Minister of Justice). The scandal was triggered by Adrian Severin's assertion that the only reason that Romania had a negative report for corruption was that the report itself was written by corrupt people. The allegations of corruption regarding the monitoring of Romania called forth a request for an apology from Joseph Daul, the leader of the EPP group in the European Parliament. While Adrian Severin argued there had been a misunderstanding, Monica Macovei accused him of his attitude being determined by the fact that he was the advocate of corrupt politicians from the PSD.

All in all, although the Internet has progressed in recent years as a significant means of communication, TV remains the primary source of information for around 70% of Romanians.<sup>9</sup> While the dedicated electoral broadcasts do not receive significant attention, the main channels through which the voters are reached is through the reports of the various political declarations contained in the evening news. Given that most politicians are aware of this, a tendency towards a strong, violent political communication style full of personal attacks is gaining more and more ground in the public sphere.

## Results

While the turnout of only 27.67% was predicted by the opinion pools, and was in line with the 29% turnout at the previous EP elections, the difference from the 45% turnout at the previous parliamentary elections underlines the low saliency of these elections. Apart from the lack of interest in European themes, the fact that the political parties treated these elections as a sparring session for the Presidential elections, and that no top candidate was actively present in the national media, decreased their overall importance.

The results for the European Parliament showed the same overall relative strength of the three most important Romanian parties. The 33 seats in the EP were distributed as follows: 11 for PSD/PC (31.07%), 10 for PD-L (29.71%), 5 for PNL (14.52%), 3 for UDMR (8.92%) and 3 for PRM (8.65%). The last seat was obtained by Elena Basescu, the quasi-independent candidate (4.22%).

Overall, the results of the election were generally in line with the predictions of the opinion polls. The group of 33 Euro-parliamentarians is composed of a mix of well-known politicians, new entries and representatives of civil society. Among the well-known politicians should be mentioned Romania's ex-Prime Minister, Theodor Stolojan (1<sup>st</sup> position on the PD-L list), Adrian Severin (1<sup>st</sup> position on the PSD/PC list), an ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs and a veteran diplomat with a good knowledge of the working mechanism in Brussels, the Ex-Minister of Defense Ioan Mircea Pascu, and Norica Nicolai (1<sup>st</sup> position on the PNL list). Meanwhile, the PD-L's list featured the high-profile ex-Minister of Justice, Monica Macovei (2<sup>nd</sup> position), and the highly pro-Traian Basescu journalist, Traian Ungureanu, and the PNL list featured Renate Weber (2<sup>nd</sup> position), another representative of civil society.

As in previous elections, both the PSD/PC and PD-L claimed victory, the PSD leaders using the numbers of votes and seats won, while the leaders of PD-L argued that it was obvious that Elena Basescu was supported by the PD-L and hence their real score should be computed by adding her 4.22% to the PD-L vote, taking it above that of the PSD.<sup>10</sup> While the close

<sup>8</sup> M. Geoană, 'Dreapta europeană se află în spatele denigrării României', 16.5.2009, [http://www.cotidianul.ro/mircea\\_geoana\\_dreapta\\_europeana\\_se\\_afla\\_in\\_spatete\\_denigrarii\\_romaniei-84649.html](http://www.cotidianul.ro/mircea_geoana_dreapta_europeana_se_afla_in_spatete_denigrarii_romaniei-84649.html), accessed 15.6.2009.

<sup>9</sup> 'Barbatii romani se informeaza de la televizor si din reclame'. Barbatii romani se informeaza de la televizor si din reclame', <http://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Marketing-PR/50240/Barbatii-romani-se-informeaza-de-la-televizor-si-din-reclame.html>, accessed 15.6.2009.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pdl.org.ro/index.php?page=stiri&textPag=0>, accessed 15.6.2009.

result between the PD-L and PSD are similar to those of the previous local (June 2008) and parliamentary elections, the PNL's 4% loss was probably caused both by the fact that they lacked the financial resources of a party in government and by the fact that they were unable to articulate a coherent critique of the existing governing coalition. While the exact winner has a symbolic aspect, immediately after the announcement of the preliminary results, the PSD claimed that its victory should allow the party to nominate Romania's candidate for the Euro-commissioner chair in Brussels. Given the tie between the two main political parties, PD-L and PSD, the results of the EP elections will probably maintain the existing rhythm of the presidential campaign.

**Table 24-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Romania**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Social Democratic Party - Conservative Party	PSD-PC	31.07	11	S&D
Democratic Liberal Party	PD-L	29.71	10	EPP
National Liberal Party	PNL	14.52	5	ALDE
Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania	UDMR	8.92	3	EPP
Greater Romania Party	PRM	8.65	3	NA
Băsescu Elena	Băsescu E.	4.22	1	EPP
Christian-Democratic National Peasants' Party	PNTCD	1.45	0	
Abraham Pavel	Abraham P.	1.03	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>33</b>	

*Notes:* Turnout 27.67%.

*Abbreviations:* S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; NA: Non-attached.

*Source:* <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=23&language=EN>

Although the PRM failed to succeed in the 2008 Parliamentary elections, by joining forces with Gigi Becali's PNG the two nationalist figures managed to enter the European Parliament. Nevertheless, their result was smaller than their separate scores in the 2007 EP elections, an indication that we should not speak of a worrisome trend toward extremism in Romanian politics.





## 25

## SLOVAKIA

*Karen Henderson*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The 2006 parliamentary election in Slovakia was a victory for Robert Fico, whose Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-SD) became the first left-wing party to take power in post-communist Slovakia. It brought about alternation of government after two broadly centre-right coalition governments under Mikuláš Dzurinda, which had successfully overseen EU accession. Holding a third of parliament's 150 seats, Smer-SD was the dominant partner in a three-party coalition. Rather unexpectedly, Fico chose to ally with two nationalist-oriented parties who had been ousted from government in 1998: the People's Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LS-HZDS) of former prime minister Vladimír Mečiar, and the Slovak National Party (SNS), led by Ján Slota.

The opposition comprised three parties of the centre-right which had ruled together for eight years: Dzurinda's Slovak Christian and Democratic Union-Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS), which was distinctly liberal; the more conservative Christian Democratic Movement (KDH); and the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK), which gained the vote of most of Slovakia's 10 per cent Hungarian minority.

The 2006 election campaign was styled by the two largest competing parties, Smer-SD and SDKÚ-DS, as a confrontation between left and right-wing economic policies, and it appeared that the Slovak party system was finally becoming defined by the conventional European divide between left and right. However, after Fico allied with the nationalists, many of the themes that had dominated the 1990s re-emerged: the politicisation of minority issues relating to ethnic Hungarians, arguments about corruption and clientelism, and accusations by the opposition that the governing parties were attempting to concentrate all political and economic power in their own hands.

Nevertheless, the government retained and augmented its electoral support, buoyed in part by the economic advantages ensuing from both EU accession and the foreign investment brought to Slovakia by the previous government's reforms. In April 2009, with just over a year to go until the next parliamentary election, the incumbent president Ivan Gašparovič, who was supported by Smer-SD and SNS, defeated the vice-chair of SDKÚ, Iveta Radičová, in the second round of the direct presidential election.

### Issues

Slovak debate on the EU is to some extent still marked by the country's tortured trajectory to membership. Although Prime Minister Mečiar of (then) HZDS made a membership application in 1995, his government's domestic policies led to Slovakia becoming the only candidate state excluded from detailed accession negotiation in 1998 for failing to meet the 'democratic' element of the Copenhagen criteria. When Mečiar's centre-right opponents won the heavily-

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contested 1998 election, they quickly began ‘catching up’ with their Visegrad neighbours Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, and were ruthless in reminding the electorate of the previous government’s failure to achieve European integration. The new governing parties gradually changed the political agenda so that Slovak national interest was less defined by traditional squabbles with the Hungarians or Czechs and was instead seen to entail securing Slovakia’s place in the EU’s family of nations, which became an acid test of government competence. HZDS and SNS, who had borne responsibility for Slovakia’s initial exclusion from EU (and NATO) membership, eventually felt forced to buy into this vision, asserting strongly that they were no hindrance to Slovakia’s role in the EU. The 2003 EU accession referendum in Slovakia, despite its undistinguished turnout, produced the strongest ‘yes’ vote ever.

The consequence of this specifically Slovak phenomenon was still strongly visible in the 2009 EP election. The EU was a valence issue: it was a good thing that all good people wanted, and all that remained to be argued about was which party was most competent at handling it. This led to the curious situation whereby Slovakia, so often regarded abroad as a country that had a problem with nationalists, proved exceptionally infertile ground for eurosceptic parties. While EP elections are commonly dominated by domestic issues throughout the EU, in Slovakia this also happens because critique of individual EU policies is particularly underdeveloped. Whether or not Slovakia would be allowed to join had for so long been the only EU issue that mattered.

The popular mood also remained strongly pro-EU in 2009. The Fico government, and particularly the Interior and Finance ministers (both from Smer-Social Democracy) had spent their initial years in government proving that they too could pass the ‘government competence’ test of achieving European integration by finishing the job and getting Slovakia into the Schengen Area (end 2007) and the Eurozone (beginning 2009).

Against this background, the details of EP election manifestos were little discussed, even by the parties themselves. The Christian Democrat KDĽ was the only parliamentary party to have developed detailed criticisms of individual EU policies, mostly in justice and home affairs issues as it feared that an increase in EU competencies might jeopardise the country’s independence to preserve Catholic values on questions such as registered partnerships, abortion and stem-cell research. However, the party’s drift towards Euroscepticism was checked after the party split the year before, and the breakaway Conservative Democrats of Slovakia (KDS) eventually allied themselves with the pan-European Libertas. This left KDĽ more in line with mainstream Christian Democrats in the European People’s Party (EPP), to which it belonged in the EP.

The more liberal SDKÚ-DS, which also belonged to the EPP, presented a manifesto that concentrated on the defence of economic liberalism. It wished to maintain the economic freedom of individual member states and preserve the flat tax they had introduced in Slovakia. A major thrust of their manifesto, however, was to criticise the economic policies of the current government. The Hungarian SMK – Slovakia’s third EPP member – was the most unreservedly pro-EU opposition party, but as always, its programme focused heavily on minority rights issues.

Among the governing parties, Smer-SD was able to legitimate its own emphasis on principles of solidarity by pointing, for example, to the long-term prioritisation of employment policies at EU level by its social democrat partners in the Party of European Socialists (now Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – S&D). The defence of Slovak national interests was also a theme, with criticism of SDKÚ-DS and SMK for having suggested the EP set up a monitoring group to look at political developments in Slovakia.

Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (ĽS-HZDS) produced a strongly pro-integration manifesto, partly because the party was still without a transnational ‘home’ in the EP and avidly sought one. Its stated desire to join the EPP had been defeated by the aversion, to Mečiar in particular, of not only the three Slovak EPP members but also some west Europeans with longer memories. Subsequent attempts to join the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) had also yet to succeed, with the consequence that the three ĽS-HZDS members in the previous EP had been some of the most pro-European non-aligned MEPs ever.

The nationalist SNS was the only parliamentary party that had failed to gain representation in the EP in 2004. It had allied itself with the Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN), and produced a manifesto that was distinctly nationalist in its determination to protect Slovak interests.

Of the extra-parliamentary parties, a new party, Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) promoted its candidates as economic experts and was somewhat eurosceptic. The Green Party, on the other hand, supported a 'democratic federal Europe' and presented as its election manifesto the common programme of all European green parties. Finally, the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), like SaS, opposed the Lisbon Treaty, yet presented a confused manifesto that was implicitly but not explicitly eurosceptic, and distinctly hostile to NATO.

### **The election campaign**

An important background to the campaign was the fact that in 2004, Slovakia had produced the lowest EP election turnout in history (at just below 17%). There was a strong feeling that it was in the national interest to improve the country's reputation by preventing a repeat performance. However, there was some uncertainty about how to do this, since it was clearly a second-order election and the risk of voter fatigue was acute because, as in 2004, the election took place shortly after two rounds of direct presidential elections in March and April. With opinion polls indicating another low turnout, Prime Minister Fico attempted to pre-empt criticism by explaining that Slovakia was 'such a pro-European oriented state' that the lack of conflict in relations with the EU 'subdued' voters.<sup>2</sup> To a large extent, he was correct: in Slovakia there was no noisy battle with eurosceptics, or any other major dispute over EU policy, to attract voters' attention.

Like Slovak parliamentary elections, EP elections are conducted by proportional representation, with parties producing a single list for the entire country. The major parties placed sitting MEPs and members of the national parliament in the 'winnable' seats in the top three places on their lists (although SNS, lacking any MEPs, also used some deputy ministers). Most sitting MEPs stood again, but Smer-SD, SDKÚ-DS and KDH put leading politicians from the national parliament at the top of their lists.

The campaign started three weeks before polling day, which for this election was on a Saturday. It was generally agreed that the campaign had somewhat higher prominence than five years previously. Party placards, often showing both candidates and party leaders, were fairly prominent, and election meetings and candidate walkabouts took place around the country. There was some press coverage, but on television it was restricted to formal election broadcasts and debates, with no reporting permitted in television news broadcasts. The main state broadcaster, STV, only decided late and under pressure to hold three TV debates between EP candidates in the week before voting. However, the political impact of the debates was restricted by the fact that all 16 parties standing gained equal representation. A number of themes emerged. One was attacks on existing MEPs for their alleged lack of activity, highlighting their advantageous financial conditions. Another was foreign policy, which may appear curious given limited EP powers in this area. Finally, economic issues, in a domestic, European and global context, also inevitably occupied the politicians.

However, the most publicised comment in the election campaign was made not by a Slovak politician but by Viktor Orbán, the opposition leader in Hungary. Speaking at a joint meeting with SMK representatives in the Hungarian border town of Esztergom on 23 May, he stated that the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament would decide how many deputies would represent Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin in Brussels, thereby suggesting that ethnic Hungarians elected in Slovakia would represent all ethnic Hungarians, rather than all Slovak citizens. The three parties in the Slovak government claimed this and other remarks aimed at 'ethnic separation, a denial of the sovereignty of neighbouring countries and challenging the territorial integrity of the Slovak Republic', and called a special session of the

<sup>2</sup> 'Fico: Na účasť vplyva antikampaň', *Sme*, 05.06.2009, <http://volby.sme.sk/c/4876371/fico-na-ucast-vplyva-antikampan.html>, accessed 6.8.2009.

Slovak parliament to condemn them just three days before the election.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, the end of the EP election campaign was dominated by anti-Hungarian nationalism. President Gašparovič contributed to this in his televised address on the elections, also made on 3 June: while primarily emphasising that citizens should participate in the election, he pointed out that they had ‘the possibility to vote for deputies who will act as a single whole in the European Union and defend the interests of Slovakia.’<sup>4</sup> This implicit denial of the existence of transnational parties in the EP was in line with the general campaign debate: most parties emphasised their ability to represent Slovak national interest, but were less focused on what this actually entailed in terms of individual EU policy areas.

Whether public opinion shifted during the election campaign is hard to gauge because of the paucity of public opinion polls. Surveys that asked how respondents would vote in a parliamentary election continued to show the ruling Smer-SD gaining over 40% of preferences, but the only survey asking about voting intentions in the EP election indicated it would obtain only 34.1% of the vote.<sup>5</sup> The discrepancy can be accounted for by the fact that it used only the replies of voters who were planning to take part in the election, and the estimate was that only between 16% and 21% of the electorate was intending to do so.

## Results

It became clear by late on the evening of Sunday 7 June that Slovakia had again ‘won’ the contest for the lowest turnout with 19.64% participation. Arguably, however, it had actually done rather well to increase turnout by 15.80% in an election that had seen an EU-wide decline of 2.45%.

The result produced few surprises, with the same six parties elected as in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Smer-SD gained nearly a third of the vote. This was less than its opinion poll preferences, but nonetheless nearly twice as much as any other party, and a notable success for a ruling social democratic party in the middle of an economic recession. However, Smer-SD’s five MEPs in the S&D group compares unfavourably with the six MEPs that Slovakia’s three opposition parties contribute to EPP voting strength. Of the other two governing parties, ĽS-HZDS gained only one MEP, who finally succeeded in joining the liberal ALDE group via membership in the smaller European Democratic Party. SNS polled lower than opinion poll preferences, and obtained only one MEP. Following the dissolution of the UEN, it joined the Europe of Freedom and Democracy group (EFD).

The most interesting element of the vote was produced by the fact that Slovak elections have an ‘open list’ system in which voters can rearrange the order of candidates on their chosen party list. This they did with enthusiasm, and in three cases (KDH, SNS and Smer-SD), the leading candidate was deposed, failing to gain election at all in the case of KDH and SNS. Given the rather negative portrayal of Slovak MEPs during the campaign, it is significant that sitting MEPs were the major beneficiaries of preference votes, particularly when they had been placed lower on their party’s list than in 2004.

Given the low turnout, it is hard to draw any conclusions about future domestic developments from the EP election result. The result confirmed both that Slovaks are complacently pro-EU, and that the party system has stabilised. However, one potentially crucial development did take place on the day the result was announced: there was a split in the Hungarian SMK, whose former leader Béla Bugár now chairs a new party called ‘Most-Híd’ (‘Bridge’ in both Slovak and Hungarian). Initial indications are that the party could succeed in establishing itself, and possibly contribute to a lessening in the tension between Slovaks and Hungarians that dominated the latter stages of the EP election campaign.

<sup>3</sup> National Council of the Slovak Republic, ‘38. schôdze Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky so začiatkom 3. 6. 2009 o 13:00’, <http://www.nrsr.sk/Default.aspx?sid=schodze/schodza&ID=215#current>, accessed 7.8.2009.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Vyhlásenie prezidenta SR Ivana Gašparoviča k voľbám do Európskeho parlamentu, 3.6.2009’, <http://www.prezident.sk/?vyhlasenie-prezidenta-sr-ivana-gasparovica-k-volbam-do-europskeho-parlamentu-3-6-2009>, accessed 6.8.2009.

<sup>5</sup> FOCUS, *Volby do EP na Slovensku*, 28.5.2009.

**Table 25-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Slovakia**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Smer-Social Democracy	Smer-SD	32.01	5	S&D
Slovak Christian and Democratic Union - Democratic Party	SDKÚ-DS	16.98	2	EPP
Party of the Hungarian Coalition	SMK	11.33	2	EPP
Christian Democratic Movement	KDH	10.78	2	EPP
People's Party- Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	ĽS-HZDS	8.97	1	ALDE
Slovak National Party	SNS	5.55	1	EFD
Freedom and Solidarity	SaS	4.71	0	-
Green Party	SZ	2.11	0	-
Conservative Democratic Party - Civic Conservative Party	KDS-OKS	2.10	0	-
Communist Party of Slovakia	KSS	1.65	0	-
Free Forum	SF	1.57	0	-
Party of the Democratic Left	SDE	0.62	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>13</b>	

*Notes:* Election Threshold 5%; Turnout 19.64%.

*Abbreviations:* S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group.

*Source:* Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, <http://www.volbysr.sk/volbyep2009>, accessed 4.7.2009.



## 26

## SLOVENIA

Grega Gostencnik<sup>1</sup>**Background**

At first glance, the Slovenian party system appears to be moderately fragmented due to the presence of several political parties. Throughout its democratic period the national parliament has consisted of 7 to 8 parties. However, political competition among these parties is clustered between two blocks of centre-left and centre-right parties. The left block consist of the reformed ex-communist party, *Socialni demokrati* (Social Democrats), *Liberalna demokracija Slovenije* (Liberal Democrats) and *Zares* (Zares, new politics). *Slovenska demokratska stranka* (Slovenian Democratic Party), *Slovenska ljudska stranka* (Slovenian Peoples Party) and *Nova Slovenija* (New Slovenia) form the centre-right, or 'spring', block. Additionally, there are two minor political parties that cannot be directly associated with either of the two blocks. The first is *Slovenska nacionalna stranka* (Slovenia national party) and the second is *Demokratska stranka upokojencev Slovenije* (The Democratic party of Pensioners).

In general, Slovenian parties have been historically divided on two issues. The first is their position on the communist legacy and the resistance movement during the Second World War. The second cleavage has even deeper roots and goes back to the beginning of the 20th Century. This conflict is about the position of the Catholic Church in society. Despite these differences among the two political blocks, the parties agree on four important issues: respect for human rights, parliamentary democracy, a generous welfare state and membership of the European Union.<sup>2</sup>

The political bi-polarization becomes visible in every pre-election period. Parliamentary elections in September 2008 were thus no exception to previous Slovenian political trends. The incumbent government coalition, led by Janez Jansa (Slovenian Democratic Party), was the first centre-right government after twelve years of coalitions dominated by the centre-left parties. For this reason, the 2004 elections were seen as the first substantial political change in a long time. Although, the government's record was in general positive, the centre-left parties managed to transform themselves after the election defeat of 2004 – also by forming the new party, *Zares* – and establish an informal coalition called 'the Left trojka'. The main campaign issues in 2008 were the parties' ability to govern the economy and improve democratic decision making. The election was won with a small margin by the Social democrats, who formed a coalition with two other centre-left parties and the Pensioners' party. The current Prime Minister is Borut Pahor, the leader of the Social Democrats and a former Member of the European Parliament.

**Issues**

The general agreement between the political parties on the positive effects of Slovenian EU membership is also reflected in the high level of support for membership among voters.

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<sup>2</sup> D. Fink-Hafner, 'Slovenia: Between Bipolarity and Broad Coalition-Building' in S. Jungerstam-Mulders (ed.), *Post-Communist EU Member States*, Ashgate, Hampshire, 2006, p. 216.

According to the Eurobarometer survey in autumn 2008, 59% of Slovenians see EU membership as positive and beneficial for their country. The majority of voters also perceive the Euro as a guarantee of economic stability. This positive attitude towards the EU is also reflected in the high level of trust that the European institutions enjoy among Slovenians, and their good knowledge of European integration.

The dominant pro-European attitude towards the European Union among Slovenian voters does not give much leverage for the development of a strong Euro-sceptic movement or party. There was only one serious attempt to form a political party based on anti-European rhetoric in 1996, when The New Party was established. The party ceased to be politically active after the national election in 2000, when it received only 0.5% of the total vote. Even the Slovenian National Party adjusted its rhetoric from Euro-sceptic to Euro-realist. The European elections in 2004 took place without any Euro-sceptic political party.<sup>3</sup>

Studies of the 2004 election campaigns for the European Parliament show that the political parties emphasized national topics rather than issues related to the European Union. Additionally, the importance of newspaper choices of topics has been established as an important feature for the salience of EU themes in the election campaign. In general, the Slovenian media present the European Union both as an opportunity and a challenge for the future development of Slovenia across economic, social and cultural issues. They have also shown more interest in the responsibilities and benefits of the Members of the European Parliament and the personalities of the candidates running in the European elections.

### **The election campaign**

The official European election campaign in 2009 was launched one month before polling day of 7 June. Compared to previous national campaigns, the campaign was shorter and less visible in the media. The political parties in general support Slovenian membership of the EU and also to a great extent accept European policies. The consensus among the parties and the absence of any conflict related to the EU required the parties to focus on the presentation of their candidates and their personal preferences. The main issues in the campaign were thus generally related to the candidates' abilities to represent Slovenia in the European Parliament.

Compared to the national election campaign in 2008, the political parties spent only about one third as much on the 2009 European election. It was thus no surprise that parties limited their campaign activities mostly to smaller meetings with voters and presentations of their candidates on TV and radio debates. The TV debates were broadcast by the public television whereas the most popular commercial TV channel did not televise any debates. The parties did not use paid TV advertisements and the use of larger billboard posters was limited. The main campaign tool was thus the campaign trail, with street stands in larger towns. The transnational European political parties were absent from any media activities in the campaign and Slovenia did not receive a visit from any European party leader in the pre-election period.

Political parties also tried to gain votes through the selection of their candidates. The first two places on the candidate lists were usually filled by high-ranking party members or politicians, followed by well-known public figures who are not members of the party. Larger parties also nominated one or two candidates from their party youth organization with the aim of attracting the younger population and presenting potential future politicians. Many Social Democrat party members were discontent with their party's candidate list, because two non-party members were nominated to the first two places and were eventually also elected to the Parliament.

Throughout the campaign, the opinion polls showed that the largest opposition party, the Slovenian Democratic Party, would win the elections by a small margin ahead of the Social Democrats, the main coalition party. The end results showed the same order of the parties as

<sup>3</sup> A. Krasovec and D. Lajh, 'The European Parliament Elections in Slovenia 7 June 2009', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network European Parliament Election Briefing No 38*, <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epernep2009slovenia.pdf>, accessed 1.10.2009.



in the opinion polls. However, the difference between the largest two parties was greater than predicted. The Social Democrats lost a substantial share of the vote compared to the Slovenian Democratic Party. Furthermore, the battle for the last seat in the Parliament between Zares and the Pensioners' party was also unpredictable. It was finally won by Zares, despite the Ultra affair related to the Zares party leader, Gregor Golobic.

Political disqualifications in the election campaign are a regular tool exploited by the political parties to gain advantage over their opponents. As mentioned above, there are very few differences between the political parties, because of an extended consensus over several issues. For this reason, the parties build their campaign strategies around the personalities of their candidates and their ability to govern, or in the case of the European elections to represent Slovenian interests at the European level. The official party campaigns are usually oriented around the presentation of their candidates and their personal preferences. However, unofficially parties also try to introduce negative information about their opponents. In these elections, the Ultra affair revealed that the Zares party leader and Minister for Science had not disclosed his ownership of a share in the Ultra company to the media when he was asked to give such information. However, he gave this information to the anti-corruption commission as he is obliged to do by law. This affair dominated the last week of the election campaign and overshadowed all the other issues previously discussed among the candidates.

Before the affair broke out, domestic issues were at the forefront of discussion. Among them, the most highly debated topics were Croatia and the economic crisis.<sup>4</sup> Slovenia had been blocking the Croatian accession process because Croatia had submitted documents to the European Union which in the opinion of Slovenia prejudged the unsettled maritime border dispute. The political parties were united in the view that if Croatia wishes to continue with the accession process it has to either remove the disputed documents or agree to mediation on the border dispute.

In the debate on the economic crisis, the right-wing opposition consistently criticized the measures adopted by the left-wing government parties as being insufficient, and accused the government of acting too slowly against the recession. The opposition parties, however, pointed out that the crisis was caused by policies also advocated by European centre-right parties and that Slovenian economic growth heavily depends on economic developments in its main trading partners, such as Germany, Austria and Italy.

Neither European policies nor the role of EU institutions were debated or emphasized either by the media or the candidates. As in the previous European elections, the media focused on the candidates and their ability to represent Slovenian interests in the European Parliament.

## Results

The European elections in Slovenia were again marked by a considerably lower turnout as compared to that for national elections, which is around 65%. At these European elections the turnout was the same as in 2004: 28%. This percentage is similar to the turnouts for referendums in Slovenia (15-30%). In general, it is believed that Slovenian voters are less interested in European elections because they consider that Slovenia and its seven MEPs have little influence on the decisions of the Parliament, and they are thus less interested in attending the elections. An additional reason for the low turnout is also the political parties themselves, which have not been able to form any substantial political programme on European issues. Instead, they run their election campaigns based on individual candidates, their personal preferences and accomplishments. For this reason their ability to mobilize the public is weaker than in national elections.<sup>5</sup>

The biggest share of votes was won by the largest opposition party, the Slovenian Democratic Party 26.92%. The largest government party, the Social Democrats, came second with an 18.45%

<sup>4</sup> A. Krasovec, S. Kustec-Lipicer and D. Lajh, 'The European Parliament Elections in Slovenia 13 June 2009', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network European Parliament Election Briefing No 18*, <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epernep2004slovenia.pdf>, accessed 1.10.2009.

<sup>5</sup> Krasovec et al. 2009.

share of votes. The two top parties each gained two seats in the parliament. In third place was the conservative party, Nova Slovenia (16.33%), followed by the two liberal parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (11.52%) and Zares (9.82%). Each of these three parties will be represented by one MEP in the Parliament. The other political parties did not receive enough votes to be represented in the European Parliament.

**Table 26-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Slovenia**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Slovenian Democratic Party	SDS	26.92	2	EPP
Social Democrats	SD	18.45	2	S&D
New Slovenia	NSi	16.33	1	EPP
Liberal Democratic Party	LDS	11.52	1	ALDE
Zares, New Politics	Zares	9.82	1	ALDE
Pensioner's democratic Party	DeSUS	7.18	0	-
Peoples' Party	SLS	3.6	0	-
Slovenian National Party	SNS	2.88	0	-
Slovenian Youth Party	SMS	1.9	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>7</b>	

*Notes:* No Election Threshold; Turnout: 28.33%.

*Abbreviations:* EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

*Source:* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/slovenia\\_en.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/slovenia_en.html).

The results of the 2009 elections do not represent any change from the general trends in Slovenian politics. The larger parties from both political blocks remain the dominant players in the Slovenian political arena. The only difference from the election in 2004 is that the centre-left parties have one more seat than the centre-right block. The two larger parties, the Slovenian Democratic Party and the Social Democrats also kept their leading positions in their own political blocks. None of the smaller parties managed to receive enough votes for a seat in the European Parliament. In a political arena dominated by traditional parties it is thus hard for smaller parties to break through the threshold and get an MEP. Furthermore, there was again an absence of Euro-sceptic political parties, which is another indicator of the general support for the European Union among voters in Slovenia.

Among the representatives elected, three are incumbent MEPs: Lojze Peterle (EPP), Jelko Kacin (ALDE) and Jordana Cizelj (EPP). The new MEPs are Milan Zver (EPP), former minister of Education and Sport in the centre-right government from 2004-2008; Zoran Thaler (S&D), former minister for foreign affairs in 1997; Tanja Fajno (S&D), press correspondent from Brussels; and Ivo Vajgl, member of the national parliament and president of the parliament's committee for foreign affairs.

The European elections were seen as the first test for the centre-left government coalition that won the general election in 2008. Even though the largest opposition party won the 2009 European elections and the margin between the first two parties, SDS and SD, was bigger than was expected, the elections had little direct impact on politics in Slovenia. The only direct consequence was a substantial decline in public support for the leader of the liberal party Zares and Minister for Science and Research, Gregor Golobic, because of the Ultra affair. Moreover, the centre-right party Nova Slovenia managed to return to the parliamentary arena after not reaching the required threshold for the national parliament in the 2008 national election.

## 27

## SPAIN

*Fernando Casal Bértoa, Mónica Ferrín and Sergi Pardos-Prado*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The Spanish party system is essentially characterized by competition between the two big national parties: the People's Party (PP) and the Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (PSOE). The structure of party competition has become increasingly bipartisan over time, mainly for two reasons. First, Izquierda Unida (IU), the former Communist party, has increasingly lost strength in national elections. As a result, it has become a residual party no longer competing at the national level. Secondly, in the 2007 and 2009 regional elections the Socialist party won in Catalonia and in the Basque Country, two regions which until very recently were governed by nationalist parties (Convergence and Union in the former and the Basque Nationalist Party in the latter). In addition, the PP recovered Galicia in March 2009 after four years of a governing coalition of nationalists and socialists. A clear attempt to end, or at least to challenge, this long-term trend towards bipartisanship took place with the foundation of Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD), which is itself the result of a minor split from the socialist party. However, it is still too early to tell whether this party will win enough votes to end the imperfect 'bipartidism' that it aims to solve.

The principal dynamic of competition is still the confrontation between the current governing party (PSOE)<sup>2</sup> and the PP (in opposition since 2004) on two main dimensions: left-right and centre-periphery. On the left-right dimension, there is a certain overlap between the two, as both parties compete for part of the same electorate, in fact these two parties have gradually moved to the centre over the years, occupying a large fringe of the political spectrum from the most extreme positions on the left (PSOE) or the right (PP) to more centrist positions. The PP has been more successful with this strategy because no party appears to cover the most extreme positions on the right, while IU situates itself as more leftist than the PSOE. However, both parties appear to represent a big majority of the electorate. Regarding the centre-periphery dimension, the PP presents itself as a more centralist party than the PSOE, although decentralization processes have in fact been conducted under both the PP and the PSOE legislatures (for example, the Health system was mainly decentralized in the second PP legislature). In the PSOE's 2004-08 period of government, the Autonomy Statutes of some regions were modified and became the main issue of competition between the two parties.

### Issues

The agenda of issues for the Spanish 2009 elections to the European Parliament was essentially non-European. This first statement already gives some insight into the weak role of the idea of Europe in structuring electoral competition and the everyday political dynamic in Spain. The

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<sup>2</sup> Since the last legislative elections in March 2008, the PSOE has governed in minority. Because no permanent coalition with other parties has been formed, it governs on the basis of ad-hoc agreements with either IU or the regional/nationalist parties.

lack of focus on European issues, the fragmentation of the issue agenda and the low saliency of the most prominent topics put forward by the political actors reinforce an image of the European elections as a true second-order event in the Spanish political system. Instead, the parties and media focused on other issues, which can be divided into those generating disagreement and polarised policy stances, and those where party competition did not rely on distinct policy positions but on images of credibility and competence in handling specific political problems.<sup>3</sup> Abortion and immigration are two of the most prominent examples of the former, whereas corruption and the management of the economic crisis are the main examples of the latter.

The non-European character of the issue agenda in Spain is a paradoxical consequence of a very high consensus on the virtues and benefits derived from belonging to the EU, and of a notable lack of differentiation regarding European stances on the supply side of the political spectrum. Regarding the positive and high consensus on the EU, some findings derived from the pre-electoral survey conducted by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* in April and May 2009<sup>4</sup> may be illuminating. There is a clear majority (54.3%) who think that belonging to the EU has mainly benefited Spain. According to this study, 70.4% hold very favourable, quite favourable or somewhat favourable attitudes towards the EU. This generally high pro-EU consensus is paralleled by an outstanding lack of interest and involvement in the specific European electoral arena. 68.2% of citizens admit to being very little informed or not informed at all on issues regarding the EU. Along the same lines, an overwhelming 73.6% of Spanish citizens said that they were following the news about the elections to the European Parliament with little interest or with no interest at all. Paradoxically, these indicators seem to be connected and not merely parallel to the lack of European content in the European elections. A high positive consensus about Europe and very little knowledge of how it works can easily result in a European election exclusively driven by national issues. This idea is confirmed by the fact that national issues are the explanation most frequently cited by Spanish citizens (22%) of how they decided their vote in the 2009 election (even above ideological proximity to the party or the personality of the leader).

Europe is good, and everybody seems to agree on that. This consensus has a correlate on the supply side of the electoral dynamic. Without exception, all parties compete in the pro-European range of the spectrum. Moreover, the group of particularly pro-Europe parties located in this common space is quite diverse in terms of socio-economic and regional orientation. This shows that agreement on European issues clearly cuts across other axes of competition. In this group one can find green alternatives (IC-V), social-democrat national parties (PSOE and UPyD), nationalist Catalan parties (ERC and CiU), and conservative options (PP).

Among the main issues structuring electoral competition in the 2009 EP elections, abortion was clearly predominant. There were two factors behind this. The first was the recent attempt by the current socialist government to make the abortion law more flexible and to allow under-aged girls to abort without the need of parental permission. The blunt opposition that this initiative generated among several social sectors was used as a mobilising electoral issue by the conservative Spanish right. The second factor behind the saliency of this moral component in the issue agenda was a polarisation between the two main candidates and the quite opposite moral views that they represent even within their own parties. On the one hand, Jaime Mayor Oreja, the PP candidate, is close to the most Christian-democrat and conservative sector of his party, and on the other hand Juan Fernando López Aguilar, the PSOE candidate, is an ex-member of the first socialist government formed by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which was characterised by well-known and particularly liberal policies towards religious and gender issues.

Another polarising issue which attracted some attention in the party and media discourse was immigration. The saliency of this issue was lower in comparison to previous electoral events (such as the Spanish General election of 2008), but still a good example of the fact

<sup>3</sup> D. Stokes, 'Spatial Models of Party Competition', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 57 (2), 1963, pp. 368-377

<sup>4</sup> Number of study 2800. See [www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es), 15.06.2009.

that position issues in Spain today seem to be not only economic. Whereas the mainstream right clearly and publicly projects a more anti-immigrant stance, the socialist elite seems to hold more liberal positions. The socialist party, however, seems to try to keep this issue off the agenda, being conscious of the fact that the heterogeneity of immigration positions within its natural electorate (and therefore the risk of losing voters by over-stressing one policy position or another) is greater than in the conservative party.

Finally, one of the most prominent components of the issue agenda in the 2009 European election in Spain concerned the management of the economic and financial crisis, and some scandals related to corruption in the two main competing parties (the PSOE and the PP). These two issues provided fertile ground for the mobilisation of discontented voters and for punishment or protest voting. Protest voting is a common trait in second-order national elections<sup>5</sup> and is obviously more potentially damaging to the party in office (the PSOE in this case). In the case of the economy, the two main competing parties do not present clearly distinguishable economic recipes but focus on the responsibility, incapacity or incompetence of the rival party in dealing with the issue. The Eurocommunist IU, to the left of the PSOE, is practically the only party to try to distinguish its economic policy from the socialist party by stressing classic interventionist recipes. Since the moderate left seems to be so well identified with clearly leftist positions on cultural and moral issues, IU tries to attract socialist voters by stressing the similarity of socio-economic policy proposals between PP and PSOE. On the other hand, the suspicion of deriving illegal economic benefits from work in a public institution affecting members of both parties, the use of official aeroplanes by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero for campaign purposes and similar topics attracted much attention, showing the horse-race character, the negativity and the lack of substantive content of the issue agenda in the Spanish 2009 European election.

### The election campaign

The electoral campaign was officially launched on 20 May 2009. It was mainly guided by the rivalry between the PP and PSOE, with all the other parties taking, for the most part, a secondary role.

The PP and PSOE developed different strategies in the campaign, more direct in the first case and more indirect (i.e. mainly through the media) in the latter. However, both parties provided clear examples of negative campaigning and their campaigns were mainly characterized by continuous attacks against each other. The PP attributed the problem of the economic crisis to the bad management of the PSOE and presented itself as the only party which could solve the crisis with the slogan: “Now solutions, now PP”. The PSOE, instead, portrayed itself as a credible government well prepared to fight the economic crisis and opened the campaign with a video about the elections in the USA. The victory of Obama in the United States was presented as the victory of protection and sustainable economic development over wild capitalism. This dichotomy was reproduced for the European Union with the slogan: “This game<sup>6</sup> is played in Europe.” Basically, and for the first time since the birth of democracy more than thirty years ago, the campaign was characterized by what could be simply called a ‘video-battle’.

Nevertheless, the means the PP and PSOE employed during the campaign were slightly different. The PP focused on a more traditional campaign of personal contacts and meetings all over Spain. The most important PP leaders visited all the regions during the campaign and carried out more than 7,300 campaign activities. As one of the most prominent campaign videos stated, “the President, the candidates and the party leaders have been travelling all around Spain, listening to the problems of the citizens and passing on the message that it is time for solutions, and the PP will provide them”.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the PSOE, even though it organised almost 5,000

<sup>5</sup> K. Reif and H. Schmitt, ‘Nine Second-Order Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results’, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 8 (1), 1980, pp. 3-45.

<sup>6</sup> In Spanish, game also means (political) party.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/pp-ha-hecho-mayor-movilizacion-unas-elecciones-europeas-democracia\\_742.html](http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/pp-ha-hecho-mayor-movilizacion-unas-elecciones-europeas-democracia_742.html). This is a video from the campaign which portrayed the party’s closeness to the public as yet another reason to vote for them.

electoral campaign events, preferred to give priority to the media and the new technologies in a clear attempt to capture the young vote and to mobilize abstainers.

In spite of the cost of the campaign,<sup>8</sup> and according to the survey mentioned above, only 14% of interviewees believed that the electoral campaign would influence their vote in the European elections, and 74.6% maintained they had already decided their vote and the campaign would have no effect on them. The same study also foresaw a slight advantage of the PSOE (42.8%) over the PP (42.2%). Both parties would get 23 seats each. The Coalition for Europe (CpE) would come in third place and get 2 seats, while the United Left (IU) and the Europe of the Peoples-The Greens (EPV) would get only one seat each. UPyD would not obtain any seat. Later on, surveys appearing in various media (e.g. *Agencia EFE*, *El País*, *El Mundo*, *Gabinete de Estudio Demoscópico*) predicted, almost unanimously, a victory for the PP, although with a low level of participation (less than 50%).

The campaign was strongly personalized, focusing around the two main party leaders, namely Premier Zapatero (PSOE), and Rajoy (PP). The list headers of the two main parties were former ministers, while there was an expert profile in the case of the other parties. On the one hand, the PSOE's candidate was a former Minister of Justice during the previous legislature as well as the main Socialist candidate in the last Canary Island regional elections. On the other hand, a former Minister of the Interior from 1996 until 2001 and current vice president of the European People's Party group in the EP was running again as the PP candidate. A former member of the EP from 1996 to 2000 was IU's candidate. CpE presented a politician very close to CiU as their national candidate. Two other rather unknown personalities completed the list among the main contending parties.

As the campaign was very much nationally focused, the truth is that there was little room for the European political parties during the campaign. Their support was perhaps more important for the smaller parties (for example, IU used the European Left's manifesto as their own), but in general their role was mostly secondary.

## Results

The results broadly confirmed the forecasts of the pollsters, with the opposition PP coming out on top and improving on its performance at the 2004 Euro elections by 1 percentage point and by 2.3 compared to the March legislative elections held just one year earlier. On the other hand, the governing Socialists received the punishment vote that seems to have affected the majority of Social-democratic parties in Europe (e.g. in Germany, the United Kingdom, etc.). Despite their efforts during the campaign, the PSOE remained in second place with roughly 38.5% of the vote, almost 4 percentage points less than the winning conservatives. However, due to the 'whims' of the d'Hondt formula, this loss translated into just two MEPs less. The conservatives seem to have gained some ground on the socialists not only as the party getting most votes at the national level, but also as the preferred party in the majority of provinces, although not in the most populous ones – with the exception of Madrid and Valencia. In general, it seems that the huge economic crisis and the lower turnout favoured the PP to the cost of the PSOE.

As in the previous elections, the main losers were the Euro-communist IU and the smaller parties, mainly the nationalists. Although the former obtained the same number of MEPs (2) as in the previous EP elections, the results confirmed the continuing decline of this party over the last five years: from 4.15% of the vote in 2004 to 3.74% in 2009, through 3.77% in the 2008 national legislative elections. Moreover, IU's place in the 'heart' of Spanish voters as the third best supported national party was seriously threatened by UPyD, a party formed just two years ago, which succeeded in obtaining 2.87% of the vote and one seat. In fact, and in spite of the discriminatory treatment given by the Spanish media to this party, it increased its support by almost 2 points compared to the last parliamentary elections, managing to overtake IU in almost all the main Spanish cities (e.g. Madrid, Seville, Bilbao, Zaragoza, and San Sebastián; although not in Barcelona or Valencia).

<sup>8</sup> Exact data is not yet available.

**Table 27–1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Spain**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
People's Party	PP	42.23	23	EPP
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	PSOE	38.51	21	S&D
Coalition for Europe*	CpE	5.12	2	ALDE
United Left- Initiative for Catalonia Greens-United and Alternative Left-Bloc for Asturias	IU-ICV-EUIA-BA	3.73	2	G/EFA (1 seat); GUE/NGL (1 seat)
Union, Progress and Democracy	UPyD	2.87	1	NA
Europe of the Peoples – The Greens	EdP-V	2.5	1	G/EFA
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>50</b>	

Notes: Turnout 44.9%.

\*Coalition for Europe was made up from regionalist parties.

Abbreviations: EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=10&language=EN>

Interestingly enough, the regional nationalist parties had the same results (in terms of both votes and seats) as five years ago, despite the movement of parties between the Coalition for Europe (CpE) and the Peoples of Europe (EP). This time, and in contrast to the previous 2004 EP elections, the regionalist parties decided to go to the polls according to their ideological position on the left-right spectrum, rather than on the basis of the 'centre-periphery' divide. Thus, while the centre-right regionalist parties (mainly CiU, PNV, and CC) gathered around the CpE, the left and centre-left regionalist parties joined the EP coalition. The former got 5.12% of the vote and two seats; the latter only 2.5% of the vote and one seat.<sup>9</sup> What is interesting, however, is the fact that these percentages of the vote are nothing other than the percentages obtained in the 2008 legislative elections by each of the component parties. This clearly shows a certain freezing of the regional nationalist electorate, whose potential for growth seems to have cooled down.

Finally, and although the 'exceptional' character of the EP elections and the low turnout (only 46%) make it difficult to extrapolate these results to national elections, the truth is that these elections have only confirmed an already established pattern in Spanish politics, 'bipartidism', as the two main parties continue to control more than 80% of the vote, leaving little room for smaller parties to have any influential role in the future.

<sup>9</sup> EPV established a system of proportional rotation among those parties which obtained more than 40,000 votes in their region. On the basis of that agreement, ERC, BNG, Aralar and the Greens will have to rotate the only seat obtained.





## SWEDEN

*Jibecke Joensson*<sup>1</sup>**Background**

Swedish politics and electoral behaviour have traditionally been among the most one-dimensional in the world. Sweden's multiparty system based on proportional representation has centred around a divide between the left- and right-wing parties; the former dominated by the Social Democrat party – overall the largest party by far, and the latter by the so-called Moderates – initially the conservative party. The Social Democrats more or less governed Sweden continuously from the turn of the century up until the constitutional reform of the 1970's. From then onwards, however, the stable five-party system gradually changed. Coalitions and new parties were formed and reformed, slowly moving Swedish party politics away from its longstanding ideological divide.<sup>2</sup>

The political campaigns and the outcome of the last national Swedish elections in 2006 clearly diverted from the traditional left-right debates of Swedish party politics. All parties moved closer to the centre and focused on issues that cut across the ideological party divide. While the Social Democrats discussed the restructuring of the public sector, especially the issue of property tax, the right-wing parties, together in an Alliance for Sweden – Allians för Sverige, focused on employment politics. The Moderates re-branded themselves the *new* Moderates with the slogan, 'the workers' party of today', and a number of single-issue parties were founded, which explicitly refrained from placing themselves on the left-right axis.<sup>3</sup>

The newly-formed Alliance defeated the one-party Social Democrat government in 2006 by 1.9%, which translated into 178 parliamentary seats for the Alliance against 171 seats for the left-wing parties. Moreover, the non-established or new parties together received 5.67% of the votes, compared to only 3.12% in the previous elections (2002). However, since none of the parties alone passed the four per cent electoral threshold which was established in the 1970s

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, European University Institute, Florence.

<sup>2</sup> Since 1967 there has been a smaller party to the left of the Social Democrats that until 1990 called itself the Communist Left Party but then changed to simply the Left party – Vansterpartiet (V). On the right of the Social Democrats, there are the Moderates – Moderata Samlingspartiet (M), the Liberals – Folkpartiet (Fp), the Centre party, previously the Agrarian – Centerpartiet (C), and the Christian Democrats, initially the Centre party – Kristendemokraterna (Kd). In 1981 a Green party was founded – Miljöpartiet (Mp). Although the party has not included itself in either of the party groups, since it entered parliament in 1988, it has established close collaboration with the left-wing parties. For more information, see O. Ruin, 'Patterns of Government Composition in Multi-Party Systems: the Case of Sweden', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 4 (A4), 1969, pp. 71-87, and O. Ruin, 'Managing Coalition Governments: the Swedish Experience', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 53 (4), 2000, pp. 710-720.

<sup>3</sup> The Moderates' re-branding can be compared to Tony Blair's New Labour party in the 1990's. For more about the 'new' moderates and the Alliance see [http://www.moderat.se/web/In\\_English.aspx](http://www.moderat.se/web/In_English.aspx), accessed 16.10.2009. Moreover, the new parties' cross-political interests ranged from immigration policies (Sverigedemokraterna, Sd), to gender politics (Feministiskt Initiativ, Fi), age discrimination (Juni Listan, JL) and freedom of information and the right to privacy on the internet, i.e. file sharing (Piratpartiet, Pp).

constitutional reform, none of them entered Parliament.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the electorate is less ideologically driven and the degree of party-identification is weakening. The political scene is opening up to new parties and the traditional left-right divide is blurring.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 2006 national elections, changes have continued on the political scene. Public support for the Alliance has come and gone, to return again in 2009. Furthermore, support for the newer parties has continued to grow, especially in the case of the Pirate party, Piratpartiet (Pp). Founded in January 2006, this party focuses exclusively on reform of the copyright law, the elimination of the patent system, and the right to privacy, explicitly placing itself outside the left-right axis. It is part of a transnational movement, supported by both NGO's and private companies. The party ran for Parliament in 2006 and recently declared that in the upcoming 2010 national elections, it also aims to stand in the local elections.<sup>6</sup>

## Issues

The Swedish political parties' election platforms for the 2009 European elections included more European, as opposed to national, issues than in 2004.<sup>7</sup> It was no longer the question of whether Sweden should remain a member of the EU that was debated, but the future of the EU and what this meant and should mean for Sweden. The strongest EU critic, the Left party – Vänsterpartiet (V), still held that Sweden would be better off without the EU, but it no longer outlined an active policy for leaving the Union. Instead, it put emphasis on new ideas for an alternative framework for European cooperation. The two other clearly Euro-sceptic parties that were standing for re-election, the Green party and the June List (JL), also engaged in more constructive than obstructive European debates.<sup>8</sup> Thus, overall, the Swedish electoral campaign can be summarized as a message that amounts to limiting yet extending the decision-making powers of the European Parliament (EP). That is, yes to further European integration, but only in certain as opposed to all of the areas included in the Treaty of Lisbon.

Although only the Left, the Green, the Pirate party and the JL opposed the Treaty of Lisbon, all the parties were somewhat critical of strengthening the EP with respect to its Member States. None of the parties wanted to hand over the regulation of the Swedish internal market to the EP, as this would threaten Swedish labour policies – the Swedish model. Neither did any of the parties support the farming subsidies and the fishing policies of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) due to their consequences for the environment and equality in the world. All in all, they were all wary of how increasing the power of the EP implied a risk of reinforcing a bureaucracy which is already suffering from over complex and costly administrative processes and institutions.

Four issues stood out in the 2009 Swedish electoral campaigns. First, the environment, climate change and energy supply figured at the top of all the parties' election agendas. Second, as in most European countries, the financial crisis made the economy a particularly important issue in the campaigns. Third, the issue of employment and the regulation of the labour market was discussed by most of the parties. Fourth, the question of health care and the mobility of medical patients was also given much attention, as was education and research, and security

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the electoral results see <http://www.val.se/val/val2006/slutlig/R/riker/roster.html>, accessed 29.10.2009.

<sup>5</sup> For more about why the sitting government was defeated see H. Oscarsson and S. Holmberg, 'Darfor vann Alliansen: En sammanfattning av nagra resultat fran valundersokningen 2006', *Demokratisk Rapport 9*, Statistiska Centralbyran, Stockholm, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> For more information about the pirate party see <http://www.piratpartiet.se/international/>, accessed 16.10.2009. See also PP International (PPI), a virtual collective network for the Pirate Party movement that is developing around the world with representation in almost 40 countries around the globe, including Brazil, Russia, South Africa and Turkey (as of November 2009); <http://www.pp-international.net/>, accessed 15.11.2009.

<sup>7</sup> For more about the 2004 European elections in Sweden see F. Langdal, 'Sweden', in J. Lodge (ed.), *The 2004 Elections to the European Parliament*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The June List (JL) is a cross-political party that was created just before the last European elections by people from primarily the private sector who called themselves non-ideological constructive EU-critics. For more information see <http://www.junilistan.se/>, accessed 17.6.2009.

policy – both internal and external. The Pirate party however did not take a position on any other European (or national for that matter) issue apart from making it clear that it opposed the Treaty of Lisbon – something which became quite puzzling as the party, after having won a seat in the EP, announced that it would join the group of Greens/European Free Alliance, which supports rather than opposes the Treaty.

All of the established parties supported a European-regulated 30 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, and added to that the importance of regulating the pollution of the seas, including fishing quotas. But in the case of the EU and the financial crisis, there was a split between the right-wing parties, which supported policies for an open and free European market, and the left-wing parties, which insisted on national regulation of the market. From this, it follows that the left-wing parties considered the Lisbon Treaty to be directly incompatible with Swedish labour policies, whilst the parties in the Alliance saw possibilities for pursuing the two policies in parallel. In the case of free movement within European health care systems, the parties on the left were hesitant while those on the right were in favour. When it came to the issue of security, and more precisely policing, the disagreements between the parties did not follow the left-right party divide. The Social Democrats, and three of the parties in the Alliance (the Moderates, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats) supported the idea of powerful legal cooperation in the shape of a European FBI, while the remaining parties on both sides (the Left party, the Green party, and the Centre party) opposed the idea.

Against this background, there were less clear-cut differences between the parties than in the previous European elections, and Euro-scepticism was significantly lower. Although Swedish parliamentarians are generally quite active within their respective European party groups; except for the Greens, the parties made little reference to the European political parties in their election platforms and public debates. In fact, many of the issues around which the political parties tried to mobilize their voters, such as whether Sweden should join the Euro, whether a referendum should be held on the Treaty of Lisbon, or Swedish unemployment rates, are not matters with which the EP is directly involved. With the next national elections looming around the corner, and new parties and party formations on the political scene, the established parties adopted a positive yet cautious approach to the EU. As a result, the parties outlined few concrete policies and overall, the European politics of the Swedish parties were ambiguous: a Union that should be more, yet less, powerful.

### The election campaign

On the whole, the 2009 election budget of the Swedish political parties doubled compared to 2004, and the campaigns were the most personalized that Sweden has thus far seen. When added together, the election budget of the right-wing parties was slightly greater than that of the left. However, once the part of the election budget allocated by the Swedish state is subtracted, it becomes clear that the left-wing parties had invested more of their 'own' resources than the right. This is partly explained by the fact that the Alliance received more state funding due to its majority in parliament. The largest individual budget was that of the Social Democrats, although it remained the same as in the previous European elections (25 million SKR, which on 17 June 2009 was equivalent to 2.3 million euros). The smallest budget was that of the Left party, which was in fact 30 percent lower than in 2004. The biggest change was in the Moderates' campaign budget, increasing by 275%.<sup>9</sup>

All of the parties used new means of communication in their campaigning. Although the parties far from abandoned traditional campaigning tools, such as flyers, posters and public meetings, a considerable share of the increase in the budgets went to producing and broadcasting video clips of the candidates. The clips were posted on the internet, on the pages of the candidates and their parties, and also on communal websites, such as YouTube. In addition,

<sup>9</sup> Table presented in the Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on 17 April 2009. See, G. Jonsson, 'M och C rekordsatsar på årets EU-valkampanj', *Dagens Nyheter*, 17.4.2009, <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/m-och-c-rekordsatsar-pa-arets-eu-valkampanj-1.846226>, accessed 17.6.2009. On 17 June 2009, the exchange rate of the Swedish Krona was 100 to 9.2 euros according to Oanda: The Currency Site <http://www.oanda.com/>, accessed 26.6.2009.

for the first time in Swedish politics the right-wing parties paid a commercial television channel (TV4) to broadcast their message as adverts. Whereas the video clips of the right-wing parties emphasised the experience and skills of their candidates in the particular area of politics which they were advocating, the left-wing parties focused more on putting forward well-known and popular candidates.

The virtual campaigning began long before the traditional. A pioneer of the new techniques, the Pirate party, engaged in a virtual campaigning effort that caught the attention of the press already in 2008, long before any other party's did. But towards the end of 2008, the individual candidates of most parties had also created their own websites. The different candidates were tapping into social networks, appearing on interactive platforms, continuously exposing themselves to the public through virtual social networks and internet portals that often cut across traditional party boundaries.<sup>10</sup> However, rather than the candidates' messages, it was the frequent travelling of the EU parliamentarians between Brussels and Strasbourg, and the level of remuneration and benefits of the parliamentarians compared to their relatively low attendance record in the Parliament, that made the headlines.

It was not until the more traditional campaigning took off that the elections for the EP received wider public attention. It was especially the active involvement of the party leaders that brought attention to the fact that the elections were soon to be held. Once the first party leader debate regarding the EP elections was held in the Swedish Parliament, and the opinion polls opened on 20 May 2009, a short but intense election campaign followed, where the Social Democrats focused on flyers to households and public meetings.<sup>11</sup> The parties in the Alliance invested more in educating election workers who appeared in the media, and on reaching out to large public forums such as unions and large corporations. All of the parties also made particular efforts to attract young and first-time voters through interactive channels.

At the beginning of April, only one in three Swedes knew that a European election was to be held in 2009.<sup>12</sup> A month later, when the polls opened for advance voting either by mail or in any polling station throughout Sweden, one in four had still not decided who to vote for, and one in three said that they would refrain from voting altogether. Opinion polls showed that if the elections had been held in early May, the Moderates would for the first time have received the most single-party votes, and the Pirate party would have received enough support to gain at least one seat in the EP. Moreover, the Green party would have gained an additional seat in the EP, while the JL would have lost all three of its seats. Apart from a slight decrease in support for the Moderates, these trends were reinforced as the campaigns intensified. Up until the very last day of the campaigns, voters remained largely uncertain about their final choice.<sup>13</sup>

## Results

Contrary to the overall trend in the EP elections across Europe, the Swedish turnout reached record levels. Despite the fact that the electoral campaigns started rather late in Sweden, participation increased by 7.68 percentage points, from 37.85 in 2004, to 45.53% in 2009,

<sup>10</sup> Examples of virtual social networks are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Examples of internet portals and interactive platforms are [www.EU-kritik.se](http://www.EU-kritik.se), set up by critics of the further integration of Sweden into the EU, [www.europaportalen.se](http://www.europaportalen.se) with an informative as opposed to a critical ambition, the social democrats' 'mitt S' <http://www.socialdemokraterna.se/Hem/> and the Moderates' 'kambanjbloggen' <http://kampanj.moderat.se/>, accessed 18.6.2009.

<sup>11</sup> The Swedish system for voting in the European elections offers one of the most generous advance voting possibilities in Europe. From 20 May 2009 onwards, Swedes with a voting card could vote via regular mail, but also in any advance polling station that had been set up in schools, local supermarkets and other public areas throughout Sweden. The voters also have the possibility of changing their advance vote on the actual voting day by simply returning to their specific polling station to vote another time.

<sup>12</sup> L. Engzell-Larsson, 'EU-val på väg mot fiasco', Fokus, 9 April 2009, <http://www.fokus.se/2009/04/eu-val-pa-vag-mot-fiasco/>, accessed 17.6.2009.

<sup>13</sup> N. Källebring, 'Junilistan ut – Piratpartiet in', *DN/Synovates väljarbarometer inför Europaparlamentsvalet*, 29.4.2009, and H. Brors, 'Unga valjare kan ge Piratpartiet EU-mandat', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29.4.2009.

making it the highest voter turnout in the European elections thus far. For the first time Sweden had a higher participation rate than the European average. The increase can be explained by three interrelated factors: (i) an exceptionally high number of registered first-time voters, (ii) the increase in the campaign budgets for using new media, and (iii) a less Euro-sceptic and traditional electorate. The high turnout is also, however, related to the fact that the elections took place only a month before the country was to take over the leadership of the European Union, and little more than a year before the next national elections in Sweden.

The right-wing parties received a marginally higher percentage of votes (42.56%) than the left-wing parties and the Green party did together (41.09%). Although the Social Democrats received the most single party votes, its support was lower compared to the previous year (-0.15%). The second highest scoring single party was the Moderates, whose support increased from the 2004 elections (+0.58%). All in all, this makes the 2009 elections one of the Social Democrat's worst elections and one of the Moderates' best. However, for both parties their number of seats in the EP remained unchanged, leaving the Social Democrats with five seats and the Moderates with four.

**Table 28-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – Sweden**

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Votes (%)	MEPs	Political Group
Social Democrats	S	24.41	5	S&D
Moderate Coalition Party	M	18.83	4	EPP
Liberal People's Party	FP	13.58	3	ALDE
Green Party	MP	11.02	2	G/EFA
Pirate Party	PP	7.13	1	G/EFA
Left Party	V	5.66	1	GUE/NGL
Centre Party	C	5.47	1	ALDE
Christian Democrats	KD	4.68	1	EPP
June List	Junilistan	3.55	0	-
Sweden Democrats	SD	3.27	0	-
Feminist Initiative	F!	2.22	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>18</b>	

Notes: Turnout 45.53%

Abbreviations: S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; G/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=27&language=EN>

The biggest winner in the Swedish elections was the Pirate party. With its 7.13% (compared to the 0.6% that it received in the 2006 national elections), the party won a seat in the European Parliament. The limited agenda on the basis of which the party conducted its campaign, made its success so sensational that it made headlines around the world. This has in turn helped pirate parties in other countries to gain attention and support from their respective electorates, as well as inspired new pirate parties to be formed. The second biggest increase in the support for a single party was achieved by the Green party (+5.06%), closely followed by Folkpartiet (+3.72%). The Green party was able to double its representation from one to two seats, and Folkpartiet to go from two to three seats. On the opposite end of the spectrum was the June List (-10.92%), which lost all three of its seats in the Parliament, and the Left party (-7.14%) which lost one of its two seats. This means that of the 18 Swedish seats in the European parliament

(one less than in the previous elections), nine are occupied by the Alliance, eight by the left-wing opposition parties, and one by the independent Pirate party.<sup>14</sup>

Although there was some overlap between the issues that the three winning parties campaigned for, their politics varied. On the one hand, there were the relatively reserved and narrow European approaches of the Green party and the Pirate party. On the other, there was the most pro-European party with the widest and the most integrative European politics of all the Swedish parties, namely Folkpartiet. Thus, it was not the actual politics alone of the parties that brought these three parties success, but the fact that they were able to communicate with the public. In other words, it was the combination of timely coherent political agendas and a successful campaigning strategy, including the use of new means of communication, which held the key to success in the 2009 European elections in Sweden.

For the Pirate party, the Internet was at the same time the primary means and the end for mobilizing voters. The issue of file sharing and privacy on the internet communicated via interactive campaigns online attracted a large majority of the first-time and young voters, especially men. Also, the party was able to place itself frequently in the media by stirring up controversy over the passing of a law to regulate traffic data in June 2008. The Green party benefited from the fact that the issue of the environment, climate and energy supply was *the* most important issue for the Swedish electorate. Similarly, Folkpartiet capitalized on the Europeanization of Swedish popular opinion since the last elections by presenting the most concrete and well-developed pro-European policies. In addition, both the Green party and Fp made significant efforts to use innovative and modern means of campaigning to communicate with the electorate.

The Swedes voted more 'Europeanly' and less ideologically in the 2009 elections than they had done in any previous elections.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that what determines the outcome of elections for the European Parliament is different from what determines the outcome for the national parliament. Instead of voting strictly according to the ideological standing of the parties, issue-specific and short-term preferences are decisive factors. Swedes thus go from being among the most one-dimensional traditional voters at home, to being quite flexible and multi-dimensional voters in Europe.

The first post-election polls show that the European elections results were mirrored in the public support for the political parties at home. This suggests that rather than being the result of a one-off protest vote, the 2009 elections are part of a larger shift in Swedish party politics away from the traditional left-right divide, and changes in the Swedish electorate, where voters no longer necessarily relate to traditional Swedish party politics. If indeed cross-political issues are becoming key to national voting behaviour as well, then in the 2010 national elections the Swedish political parties will face an electorate of better informed voters, who are practically-, as opposed to ideologically-, minded.

<sup>14</sup> [www.val.se](http://www.val.se), accessed 22.6.2009.

<sup>15</sup> See Sveriges Televisions Valundersökning EUP-valet 2009, [https://svt.se/content/1/c8/01/58/69/54/Valuresultat\\_090611\\_final.pdf](https://svt.se/content/1/c8/01/58/69/54/Valuresultat_090611_final.pdf), [www.val.se/val/ep2009/slutresultat/rike/index/html](http://www.val.se/val/ep2009/slutresultat/rike/index/html), accessed 18.6.2009, and <http://www.val2009-resultat.eu/>, accessed 18.6.2009.

## UNITED KINGDOM

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### Background

The political atmosphere in the United Kingdom (UK) in the spring of 2009 was characterized by mounting public disaffection in politicians, a lack of confidence in the political system as a whole and furious activity by the leaders of all parties to respond to this unprecedented situation. The spark that set light to this crisis was the revelations by a national newspaper of the expense claims made by Members of Parliament (MPs) from all parties. Since many of these claims were for extravagant items and/or large sums of money, they not only caused great embarrassment to the parties but they also provoked fury among the British public, not least given the economic difficulties that many people were facing.

The party leaderships were rather slow to realize just how strongly the public felt about the excessive claims made by many MPs. However, once they finally acknowledged the depth of feeling on the issue, and given that the next general election must be held by early June 2010, all three main parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats) began trying to 'put their house in order' and to show, by talking about widespread reform of the political system, how committed they are to reengaging with the electorate and restoring the public's confidence in politics.

Even before the expenses scandal broke, things were not looking too good for the governing Labour Party (which won the general election of 2005 with 35.2% of the votes and 55.1% of the seats). The Conservative Party finally looked resurgent, there were significant concerns among voters about the state of the economy (including falling house prices, job losses and huge public debt), and there was an increasing lack of public confidence in Prime Minister Gordon Brown, principally in relation to his handling of the economic crisis.

Against this backdrop, and given the British electorate's rather Eurosceptic convictions (see below), a number of new anti-political establishment parties chose to enter the contest for the European Parliament (EP) elections. They included the pan-European party Libertas, as well as the Jury Team (a populist, anti-party coalition of independent candidates who presented themselves online and were elected by text message by anyone who cared to vote)<sup>2</sup> and No2EU – Yes to Democracy (a left-wing, trade union-backed alliance of parties and campaigning groups, which called, among other things, for many policy competences to be returned to member states, for the Lisbon Treaty to be rejected, and for Britain to stay out the Eurozone).<sup>3</sup> These new organizations entered the race alongside older contenders like the Green Party of England and Wales, the Scottish Green Party, the Green Party in Northern Ireland, the Scottish Socialist Party, the anti-European UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the extreme right British National Party (BNP).

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Carter, Keele University; Gemma Loomes, University of Birmingham; Thomas Carl Lundberg, University of Glasgow.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.juryteam.org/index.php>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://no2eu.com/>

Across the Irish Sea, the EP elections also provided the first real opportunity for voters to deliver their verdict on the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) decision in 2007 to share power with Sinn Féin in the Northern Ireland executive.

### Issues

In their manifestos and election materials, the parties addressed a combination of European and domestic issues. The Labour Party focused on the need to nurture strong international alliances so as to create jobs, fight climate change and protect security, but also emphasized its domestic commitment to maintaining public investment, tackling crime and curbing immigration. Although the Conservative Party also pledged to work within the EU on environmental matters, the party emphasized its opposition to the Lisbon Treaty (continuing to promise a referendum on the issue) and to the adoption of the Euro. The party also underlined its support for keeping the UK's EU budget rebate and the opt-out from the EU Working Time Directive. On domestic issues, the Conservatives attacked the Labour government's handling of the economy and highlighted the growing unemployment rate and public debt. The Liberal Democrats, for their part, emphasized many of the same European issues as the Labour Party and attacked the Conservatives on their isolation in Europe, especially in view of the Conservatives' planned departure from the European People's Party – European Democrats group in the EP. On domestic issues, the Liberal Democrats' criticisms were directed towards the Labour government and its economic record in particular. While some of the smaller parties (e.g. The Greens, the BNP, and the Jury Team) also presented election materials that covered a mix of European and domestic issues, the Eurosceptic parties (UKIP and No2EU – Yes to Democracy) focused predominantly on EU issues.

Many of the same themes dominated the campaigns outside England. That said, in Scotland there was greater focus, especially from the Scottish National Party (SNP), on economic recovery and employment. The SNP proposed investing European regional development funding in job creation and protection, seeking to portray itself as standing up for Scotland in Europe (not least by opposing the Common Fisheries Policy which the party believes is damaging for Scottish fishing communities). The SNP also argued it was best positioned to fight the Labour government's proposed cuts to Scottish spending. In Wales, the economic crisis was also an important theme. Plaid Cymru campaigned strongly on workers' protection during recessionary times, and, like the SNP, called for EU regional development funding. The party also attacked the Labour government for being 'out of touch', and it called for greater devolution of power, claiming that the tainted politicians at Westminster had no moral authority to block this constitutional change. Although the economic crisis and the expenses scandal featured in the campaign in Northern Ireland, here the most important theme was the power-sharing agreement within the Northern Ireland executive. In particular, the presence of the Traditional Unionist Voice candidate Jim Allister (a former DUP Member of the European Parliament (MEP) who had left the DUP over the party's decision to share power with Sinn Féin) brought prospects of a three way split in the Unionist vote.

The issues in the parties' manifestos and election leaflets were not the same as the themes that shaped the campaign, however. Instead, and as is typical in EP elections in the UK, the campaign predominantly revolved around domestic issues. In this instance it was the scale of the expenses scandal and the fact that English local elections were being held the same day as the EP ones that sucked any real European flavour from the campaign. This was reflected in a Guardian ICM poll conducted in the third week of May that revealed that 63% of those surveyed would vote 'mostly' or 'entirely' on domestic issues and only 22% would vote mainly on European ones.<sup>4</sup>

The media also showed little interest in the European nature of the contest: party manifesto launches were largely ignored and the main debate among commentators was over whether UK voters would use the election as way to protest against the establishment parties (such as

<sup>4</sup> A. Stratton, 'MPs' expenses: voters turn away from mainstream parties', *The Guardian*, 22.5.2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/may/22/ukip-green-small-political-parties-poll>.



by voting for the BNP) or simply abstain altogether. In essence, the election ended up being a referendum on the established parties and on the Labour government in particular.

The failure by voters to be mobilized by European issues does not mean that the UK electorate is ambivalent towards the EU. On the contrary, the UK is one of the most Eurosceptic countries in the Union and the negative image of the EU in the UK is alive and well, as evidenced by a January YouGov poll that showed 64% of respondents demanding a radical change in Britain's relationship with the EU, including an end to political integration and the supremacy of the European Court, 48% favouring a looser relationship based on trade and voluntary co-operation, and a further 16% supporting withdrawal from the EU. In this poll only 22% supported Britain remaining an EU member on current terms.<sup>5</sup> The poor perception of the EU is further reflected in and indeed exacerbated by the long history of sensational (and sometimes quite inaccurate) reporting of EU stories in the tabloid press.<sup>6</sup> All in all, this environment clearly plays into the hands of some anti-political establishment parties, such as UKIP, as well as the BNP.

### **The election campaign**

The parties launched their campaigns in mid-May (usually the week of the 11th), with the last day of campaigning being 3 June, the day before the election was held in the UK. The main theme for most parties was the economic crisis, with parties arguing that the top priority was the promotion of recovery and job creation. The general theme of reforming politics – a reaction to the expenses scandal – was also prominent in the campaign, and a number of parties, including UKIP and the BNP (the two parties best known for wanting the UK to withdraw from the EU), argued that the UK's membership of the EU further exacerbated waste and corruption in public life. While some more specific campaign issues arose, such as the SNP's call for a reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and Plaid Cymru's request for more EU development funding for Wales, the larger issue of tackling the economic crisis dominated.

Opinion polling in early May, right before the beginning of the parties' campaigns, showed the Conservatives in the lead, with average support in the mid-thirties as a percentage of those polled.<sup>7</sup> Labour was in the mid-twenties, the Liberal Democrats in the high teens, UKIP at just under ten per cent, and the BNP and Greens in single figures. Polling at the end of the campaign period saw the Conservatives drop to the high twenties and Labour drop to the high teens, with Liberal Democrats in the mid-teens and UKIP rising to the high teens. The Greens came in around ten per cent in these final polls, while the BNP hovered around five. Thus, the final opinion polls were reasonably close to the actual election result.

Campaigning was done via the typical routes used by British parties – news conferences, leafleting, internet sites, and the free television time allocated to parties for their election broadcasts. Some television programmes, including the BBC's 'Question Time', focused on the election. Most of the leading candidates for Britain's EP seats were incumbents seeking re-election. There were no celebrity candidacies unlike in 2004, when a television presenter, Robert Kilroy-Silk, stood for UKIP. Several of the candidates, however, had appeared on television current affairs programming in the past.

While the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens referred to their EP groups in their manifestos, and while the issue of the Conservatives leaving the European People's Party – European Democrats EP group was raised on a number of occasions in the campaign, there was virtually no mention at all of the Europarties in the run up to the election. Furthermore, although some of the broad themes addressed in the manifestos of the main national parties were the same as those contained in the manifestos of the Europarties (e.g.

<sup>5</sup> GlobalVision, 'New YouGov poll launches TPA/Global Vision EU campaign: Overwhelming public demand for radical change', 11.1.2009, <http://www.global-vision.net/GVTPAY2106.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Common EU Myths', <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/institutions/britain-in-the-european-union/quick-guide-to-the-eu/what-is-the-eu/common-eu-myths>, accessed 24.5.2009.

<sup>7</sup> UK Polling Report, European Elections, 2009 European Voting Intention, <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog/european-elections>

job creation, environmental concerns, international security), there was no evidence that the national parties had drawn on 'their' Europarty's manifesto in any way whatsoever. With the exception of the Labour Party's invitation to PES activists to come and campaign in the London and South East regions, Europarty connections (such as visits from leading personnel) were not exploited during the campaign either.

## Results

The EP election of June 2009 was a disaster for the governing Labour Party. The party recorded its worst result in a national election for nearly a century. It polled a mere 15.7% of the vote in Britain and came third behind the Conservative Party (which won 27.7% of the ballots) and UKIP (which gained 16.5%). In two regions of England (South East and South West) Labour finished in fifth place, behind the Conservatives, UKIP, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. The results also signalled an end to Labour's dominance in Wales and underlined the party's loss of strength in Scotland. Having finished first in all elections since 1918 in Wales, the party was narrowly pushed into second place by the Conservatives. North of the border, Labour was easily beaten by the SNP, which recorded an impressive 29.1% of the vote (up by over 9 percentage points) in Scotland.

The severity of Labour's defeat may be explained by a number of factors. Although the turnout in EP elections in the UK has always been lower than the EU average (which was 43.1% in 2009), the expenses scandals and the public's increasing disrespect for the political class appeared to have put even more people off from voting in this contest. At 34.7%, turnout in the UK was down from 2004 (when it was 38.5% as compared to 45.5% across the EU) and all three main parties lost votes. Crucial for Labour, however, was the fact it was mainly Labour Party voters who stayed at home. While the Conservatives lost just under 200,000 votes compared to 2004, and the Liberal Democrats lost just over 371,000, the Labour Party lost over 1.3 million votes. The second main explanation for Labour's dismal result is that the party has simply lost the support of parts of its core electorate. In the face of an economy that shows no signs of recovery, of likely future public spending cuts, and of big questions over how government is run, support for the party is evaporating. The party is in disarray and, having faced a number of challenges to his leadership, Prime Minister Gordon Brown is clinging to his job by his fingernails.

The public's lack of confidence in the main parties did benefit some anti-political establishment parties. The Green Party of England and Wales won 275,000 more votes in 2009 as compared to 2004 and it saw its vote share increase by 2.8 percentage points. This did not translate into greater representation in the EP, however: the party once again returned just two MEPs. By contrast, the BNP made smaller gains in terms of votes – it won 135,000 more votes in 2009 as compared to five years previously and its vote share rose by 1.3 percentage points – but this result did mean the party won seats in the EP (see below). The strongest anti-political establishment party, UKIP, actually lost over 160,000 votes in this election, as compared to 2004. That said, it polled a slightly higher vote share and gained one more seat than five years previously. As for the newer contenders, No2EU – Yes to Democracy won 1.0% of the British votes, while the Jury Team and Libertas each secured 0.5% of the ballots. Libertas' poor performance in Britain is explained, in large part, by the strong competition the party faced from UKIP.

Away from Labour's catastrophic result, the big story of the 2009 contest was the election of two BNP MEPs, one (the party leader, Nick Griffin) in the North West electoral region and the other in Yorkshire and the Humber. In both regions the BNP was clearly helped by the low turnout: in both areas the party actually won fewer votes than it did in 2004, but its vote share increased sufficiently to enable it to win seats.<sup>8</sup> The BNP's victory marks a watershed because this is the first time a British extreme right party has won representation in a national election in the UK. Unsurprisingly, there has been strong reaction to and dismay over this result from large sections of the public and from mainstream politicians.

<sup>8</sup> UK Office of the European Parliament, 'Results of 2009 European elections in the UK', accessed 11.6.2009, <http://www.europarl.org.uk/section/european-elections/results-2009-european-elections-uk>

Table 29-1 Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections – United Kingdom

Party/Coalition	Abbr.	Vote (%)	MEPs	Political Group
<b>Great Britain</b>				
Conservative Party	Con	27.7	25	ECR
UK Independence Party	UKIP	16.5	13	EFD
Labour Party	Lab	15.7	13	S&D
Liberal Democrats	LD	13.7	11	ALDE
Green Party of England & Wales	Greens	8.6	2	G/EFA
British National Party	BNP	6.2	2	NA
Scottish National Party	SNP	2.1	2	G/EFA
Plaid Cymru	PC	0.8	1	G/EFA
English Democrats	ED	1.8	0	-
Christian Party / Christian Peoples Alliance	CP / CPA	1.6	0	-
Socialist Labour Party	SLP	1.1	0	-
No2EU – Yes to Democracy	No2EU	1.0	0	-
Jury Team	Jury	0.5	0	-
United Kingdom First	UK First	0.5	0	-
Scottish Green Party	Scottish Greens	0.5	0	-
Libertas	Libertas	0.5	0	-
<b>Northern Ireland*</b>				
Sinn Féin	SF	26.0	1	GUE/NGL
Democratic Unionist Party	DUP	18.2	1	NA
Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force**	UCUNF	17.1	1	ECR
Social Democratic and Labour Party	SDLP	16.2	0	-
Traditional Unionist Voice	TUV	13.7	0	-
Alliance Party	AP	5.5	0	-
Green Party (NI)	Greens (NI)	3.3	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>72</b>	

Notes: No election threshold; Turnout: 34.7%.

\* Single Transferable Vote electoral system; vote share refers to the percentage of first preference votes received.

\*\* Electoral alliance between Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and British Conservatives.

Abbreviations: ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; NA: Non-attached; G/EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left.

Source: [http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/united\\_kingdom\\_en.html#ancre4](http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/united_kingdom_en.html#ancre4)

The main consequences of these election results are that a Labour defeat at the next general election appears ever more likely, and that it is far from certain that Gordon Brown will be the

man to lead the party into that election. But this is because the Labour Party did so badly, not because the Conservatives did so well. After all, the Conservatives won fewer votes than they did in 2004 and only increased their vote share by one percentage point. The results also suggest that UKIP is strengthening its place in the British party system (at least in EP elections), and that the SNP is cementing its position as Scotland's strongest party. As for the BNP, its future role in British electoral politics and its place in the national party system will depend both on the public's longer term reaction to the party's victory and on how the party deals (especially internally) with representation in the EP.

In Northern Ireland, where 3 EP seats are up for grabs and voters elected their MEPs by way of the Single Transferable Vote, turnout was also significantly down on 2004 (42.4% as compared to 51.2%). Here Sinn Féin was the main winner. The party topped the poll (even though it won fewer votes and a slightly smaller vote share than it did in 2004) and Bairbre de Brún was the only candidate to reach the quota on the first count. This was a historic victory, since the DUP has been the strongest party in all previous EP elections. This time, however, the DUP was hit hard by rifts within the Unionist camp. Jim Allister, the Traditional Unionist Voice candidate, took many votes away from the DUP's Diane Dodds. Dodds finally finished third, behind Jim Nicholson of the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists (New Force).<sup>9</sup> The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) failed to win a seat. The election results in Northern Ireland indicate further political polarization in the province and the battle within the Unionist camp signals growing dissatisfaction among Unionist voters over the present governing arrangements as laid out under the Good Friday Agreement.

Although the 2009 EP election, both in Britain and in Northern Ireland, did undoubtedly take on a 'second-order' character – turnout was low and smaller parties performed reasonably well – the fallout from this contest, in all parts of the UK, was far from insignificant. The Labour government suffered a very hard blow, which has intensified internal party strife and significantly worsened the chances of the party at the next general election; the gains of both UKIP and the BNP have put further pressure on the traditional shape of the British party system; the arrangements for power-sharing in Northern Ireland appear increasingly under strain; and there is growing debate over all sorts of political and institutional reform, right across the UK. In short, this second-order election looks to have produced first order consequences.

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<sup>9</sup> The Ulster Conservatives and Unionists (New Force) is an electoral alliance between the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Conservative Party. Formed in 2009, it contests EP elections and elections to the UK House of Commons.





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