

ELECTION BRIEFING NO 18 EUROPE AND THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN SLOVENIA, OCTOBER 2004

Alenka Krašovec and Simona Kustec-Lipicer
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

E-mail addresses: alenka.krasovec@fdv.uni-lj.si; simona.kustec-lipicer@fdv.uni-lj.si;

Key points:

- The unexpected and convincing election winner was the Slovenian Democratic Party with 29.08% of the votes.
- The 2004 elections marked the end of 12 years dominance by Liberal Democracy of Slovenia. Centre-right parties (the Slovenian Democratic Party, Slovene People's Party and New Slovenia) received 44.99% of the votes.
- The new government is a centre-right one composed of the Slovenian Democratic Party, New Slovenia, the Slovene People's Party, and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia.
- The turnout of 60.64% was the lowest among parliamentary elections since 1990.
- The election campaign was more or less expected and predicted, we can characterise it as boring and rigid; personal contacts with the voters were emphasized.
- In the election campaign, only indirect references were made to EU issues, although some latent forms of Euroscepticism can be traced.
- Ideological questions, which were always strongly present in former election campaigns were presented only implicitly and indirectly in this one.

Background

When analysing the background of the 2004 parliamentary elections we would like to stress some of the political events and issues that could be interpreted as the preludes for the political changes in Slovenia mentioned above. The first two years after the 2000 elections were very calm in the political sense. Almost all political analysts agree that the period was characterized by passiveness, even apathetic opposition, mainly because of the way that the

'voting machine' of the government coalition in the parliament prevented almost all opposition actions. The political stage has become more excited especially after the decision of the premier and Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) leader Janez Drnovšek to compete in the 2002 Presidential elections, which he won. The two main questions before the election (but also, to some extent, after it) were who will become: the new premier and the leader of Liberal Democracy? After some internal disputes (in the public eye, in fact, seen as only minor disputes) it soon became clear that the then Minister of Finance Anton Rop would occupy these two positions. The change of premier and Liberal Democracy leader is commonly seen as a turning point which brought (for some an unexpected) political shift in Slovenia during the following two years.

In fact, the 2002 Presidential election were also a kind of surprise. The fact that Drnovšek received 'only' 56.5 % of the votes in the second round was described by some political analysts as a surprise; especially since the other candidate, Barbara Brezigar, was somewhat politically inexperienced. On the other hand, this could be seen as an early indicator that people were fed up with the same political faces. At the beginning of 2003 it became evident that something had changed in the electorate. Public opinion polls indicated decreasing levels of support for Liberal Democracy and for the government led by Rop. Nevertheless, at the time decreasing support for Liberal Democracy and the government was not yet mirrored in increasing support for the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (SDP).

After the 2002 Presidential elections, the March 2003 EU and NATO referendums were probably the next turning points.¹ In the case of both referendums actually all the parliamentary parties acted as a homogeneous bloc, while the period after this event was described as a continuous election campaign where the Slovenian Democratic Party dictated the issues and tempo of the campaign.

During the last two years, Liberal Democracy was increasingly presented as a party connected with *corruption and clientelism*. In May 2004, events connected with accusations from opposition parties about corruption and clientelism in Liberal Democracy reached a peak, and even an extraordinary session of parliament was held to discuss this problem. At a party congress held in December 2004 (after the elections), Liberal Democracy leader Rop acknowledged that in last few years, the party had frequently had an improper attitude towards citizens and that some party members of LDS were involved in clientelism.

The last two years were also marked by: a number of *extraordinary sessions of parliament*, some interpellations against Liberal Democracy and the United List of Social Democrats (ULSD – Liberal Democracy's junior coalition partner) ministers, and almost daily press conferences organized by the Slovenian Democratic Party. Together with incorrectnesses revealed in a number of policy fields or sub-systems - for example in the health, social security and financial subsystems - these events were creating a picture of an extraordinary situation in the country. Liberal Democracy and its ministers, as a rule, responded with a legalistic approach: the party and its ministers created special commissions in the ministries and awaited their reports. Meanwhile the public demanded not legal but simple answers how such incorrectnesses could be allowed to happen. Answers and reports produced after longer examinations, frequently associated with an arrogant attitude of the responsible persons from Liberal Democracy, also revealed a number of mistakes and emptiness in the legal system

¹ For more on this see: D. Lajh and A. Krasovec, 'The Slovenian EU (and NATO) Accession Referendum(s), March 23 2003,' *Opposing Europe Research Network Referendum Briefing No 3* at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/slovenian3.pdf>.

created during last decade when Liberal Democracy was the strongest governmental party. One of the major mistakes made by Liberal Democracy in these circumstances was its passiveness which could also be interpreted as a lack of ideas of how it should run the country.

It was quite unexpected that so called standard *ideological issues* were almost completely absent in the 2004 campaign although these issues are commonly seen as important cleavages in the Slovenian political arena. The main ideological issue, in fact a specifically Slovenian one, that had been always presented in previous campaigns – events during the Second World War, especially the question of liberation movement and socialist revolution on the one hand and collaboration of some parts of political forces with the Nazis on the other, and interpretations of these events - was not discussed at all. The other issue was secularization or relations between the Roman-Catholic church and the state, in last years frequently exposed in a radical way by Slovenian metropolitan. The reason that the latter cleavage was not represented in the campaign was probably due to the fact that Slovenia was waiting for the nomination of the new metropolitan from the Spring until December 2004.

On the other hand, at least implicitly *some other (new) ideological issues* featured in the campaign. During the last parliamentary period, minority rights issues were widely discussed. According to public opinion polls conducted in the 1990s Slovenes are, in general, quite intolerant to all kinds of minorities. In fact some issues associated with the local level (municipalities) have become prominent issues of minority protection at the national level. We can quote at least two examples of this. The first one is the question of mosque and rights of religious minority. Muslims in Slovenia have been trying to build their first mosque for a long time. The mosque question was originally an issue of the City of Ljubljana (in the city council, Liberal Democracy and the United List of Social Democrats have a majority, while the mayor is also from the United List) but in the last two years this question has become a prominent national question too. There was also a demand (on the basis of signatures gathered by the citizens of the city) to conduct a referendum in Ljubljana on this question, but the Constitutional Court decided that the question proposed was not in accordance with the constitution. The second example is the issue of (special) rights for the Roma population. In some municipalities there were conflicts between Roma and the local population. The latter consequently organized protests in front of the government building and demanded special protection since the local authorities did not seem to be prepared to protect them. The issue developed into one of: why the local population should respect law while the Roma population should not, even without any legal consequences for their attitude?

One of the hottest political issues in the second half of 2003 and early 2004 was the question of the so-called 'erased persons' – citizens of the former Yugoslav republics who, in 1992, were erased from the register of permanent residents of Slovenia and moved to the register of foreigners. This situation emerged because they had not applied to obtain their Slovenian citizenship or permanent residence by a certain date. Consequently, these people have not subsequently had their legal status in Slovenia put in order. In March 2003, the Constitutional Court decided that people who had had their permanent residence approved in the meantime (from 1992 to 2003) should also gain this status for the period from 1992 onwards. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was assigned the task of preparing and proposing a law to implement the decision of the Constitutional Court. According to the opposition, the proposed law prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs would provide a legal basis for a number of complaints against the state potentially involving substantial damages. Moreover, according to the opposition, those people who acted against Slovenia during the Ten-day War in 1991

would now have the opportunity to take legal action against the state and also to receive substantial damages. The question of the erased persons slowly emerged into one of the most important political issues. From October 2003 until February 2004 there were no fewer than 5 extraordinary sessions of parliament on questions related to this issue. At the beginning of April 2004 there was even a subsequent referendum held on the 'Law on Implementation of Point 8 of the Decision of the Constitutional Court'. Prior to the referendum, the Constitutional Court decided that it could be held, although the referendum result would not have any legal consequences. Nevertheless, the referendum was held and it could be said the opposition won since the majority of people who participated in the referendum supported its proposal.

On the basis of these ideological questions, and others such as gay rights, two new clusters of political groupings emerged. On one side there was Liberal Democracy and the United List of Social Democrats. On the other side there was the Slovenian Democratic Party, New Slovenia, Slovenian National Party together with the Slovene People's Party. The latter group has clearly taken a conservative-traditionalist stand on all of these issues. We can conclude all these issues heavily marked the political arena in the last few years. However, they were surprisingly only implicitly invoked in the actual official election campaign.

Results

Table 1: Results of the October 2004 Slovenian parliamentary²

	Number of votes	% of votes	Number of MP's	% of MP's
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia ³	220.848	22.80	23	25.55
Slovenian Democratic Party ⁴	281.710	29.08	29	32.22
United List of Social Democrats ⁵	98.527	10.17	10	11.11
Slovene People's Party ⁶	66.032	6.82	7	7.77
New Slovenia-Christian People's Party	88.073	9.09	9	10.00
Slovenian National Party	60.750	6.27	6	6.66
Democratic Party of Retired persons of Slovenia	39.150	4.04	4	4.44

Source: Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia: 112/04.

At the 2004 national parliamentary elections in Slovenia, 23 political parties, list of candidates or independent candidates competed for the 88 seats in the National Assembly. As **Table 1**

² The surprise was also a high percentage of wasted votes (11.7 %) since at the last elections only 3.8 % of votes were wasted (the average in the first three elections was 12.3 %).

³ In 1990 this party was known as Alliance of Socialist Youth of Slovenia–Liberal Party. In 1992 it changed its name to the Liberal Democratic Party. In 1994 it merged with the part of the Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Socialist Party of Slovenia into Liberal Democracy of Slovenia.

⁴ At the 1990 elections this party was named the Social Democratic Alliance of Slovenia. In 1992 it was renamed the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia and in 2003 the Slovenian Democratic Party.

⁵ In the 1990 elections the party competed under the name League of Communists of Slovenia–Party of Democratic Renewal. In the 1992 elections it competed together with the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia, the Social Democratic Union and the Working Party under the name United List. In 1993 all of these parties, except for the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia, merged into one party, called the United List of Social Democrats.

⁶ In the 1990 elections the party was known as the Alliance of Slovenian Farmers'. In the 1992 and 1996 elections the party competed under the name Slovene People's Party. In April 2000, together with the Slovenian Christian Democrats formed a new party SPP+SCD–Slovene People's Party. But just before 2000 elections one part of the party (mainly former Christian Democrats) formed New Slovenia–Christian Peoples' Party.

shows, 7 parties managed to reach the threshold of 4%, while the other 16 received on average around 1% support.⁷ The results for the independent candidates were even lower with an average of 0.03% support.⁸ 5 candidates competed for the seat, reserved for the Hungarian minority while there was only one candidate who stood for the seat, reserved for the Italian minority.

As **Table 2** shows, the 2004 elections was also characterized by having the lowest turnout since 1990. A lower turnout than in previous elections could be at least partly expected since the turnout on EP election in June in the same year was a record-breaking low of only 28.3%. On the other hand, all public opinion polls indicated that the battle between Liberal Democracy and the Slovenian Democratic Party would be bitter. This normally should be a factor which would raise turnout but it seems that turnout of 60.5% was an upper margin of turnout after all the political events that occurred in the last parliamentary period (presidential elections, local elections, election to the upper house of the parliament, 7 nation-wide referendums, EP elections).

Table 2: Turnout figures for Slovenian Parliamentary elections from 1990 to 2004 (%)

1990	1992	1996	2000	2004
83.3	85.8	73.7	70.3	60.6

Sources: Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia: 17/90; 60/92; 65/96; 98/2000, 112/04 and Krašovec, Alenka and Boh, Tomaž (2002): Podatki o preteklih volitvah (1990, 1992, 1996, 2000) (Data on the past elections (1990, 1992, 1996, 2000)). In: Fink Hafner, Danica and Boh, Tomaž. Parlamentarne volitve 2000 (The Parliamentary Elections 2000). Fakulteta za družbene vede, Ljubljana, pages 173, 174.

The Slovenian Democratic Party was the overall winner from at least two perspectives. Firstly the party received the highest percentage of the votes and consequently the highest number of seats in the parliament. At the same time, the party also increased its percentage of the vote and number of seats significantly in comparison to last elections in 2000 (from 15.8% to 29.08% and from 16 to 29 seats).

Liberal Democracy suffered the biggest decline: in 2004 it received only 22.80% of votes and 23 seats compared to 36.2% and 34 seats in 2000, and has now only one MP more than in 1992. In comparison to the last elections, the United List of Social Democrats and the Slovene People's Party (SPP) also lost some support. New Slovenia (NSi), on the other hand, received almost the same share of votes it did in 2000. This result was lower than the party expected. New Slovenia's expectations were encouraged particularly by its victory in the EP elections in June when it won a plurality of votes with 23.6%. However, it would be more appropriate to describe the party's victory in the EP elections as a big surprise, (it was mainly connected with the selection of a particularly strong and popular candidate), while the result of the parliamentary elections was more expected.

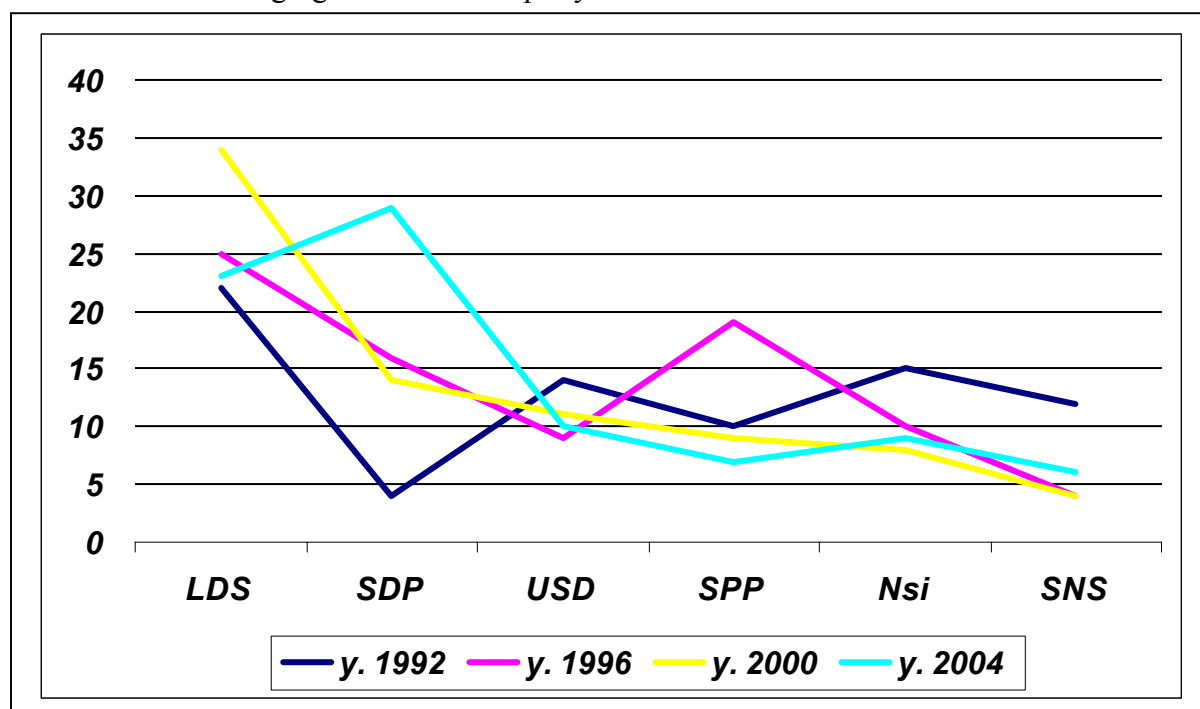
After the 1992 elections, the Slovenian National Party (SNP) once again gained more visible support among the voters. Its support in the 2004 elections was almost 2% higher than in 2000. The Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (DPRPS) lost more than 1% in comparison with 2000. This, in fact small, loss seriously jeopardized the party's entrance into the parliament, which was in doubt until the official announcement of the results; even after the definite unofficial results there were some suspicions about the party's result. The

⁷ The totals of the voting percentages of the parties that did not manage to enter the parliament divided by the totals of these parties.

⁸ The totals of the voting percentages of the independent candidates divided by the totals of these candidates.

Slovenian Democratic Party unexpectedly demanded re-counts in some electoral commissions. But the demand soon silently vanished. The only parliamentary party that did not succeed in re-entering parliament was the Youth Party of Slovenia, which was surprisingly successful in 2000. Especially in the last year it became reasonable to predict that party would not be able to reach the threshold once again. During this year several disputes occurred within the party and slowly individual MPs were leaving it so that it lost all of its MPs at the beginning of September 2004. The result of these disputes (accusations of an undemocratic way of leading the party were among the most frequent) was the establishment of new party, named Active Slovenia, which gained 2.97% of the votes. Its result represents the biggest share of votes gained by parties that failed to obtain parliamentary representation. On the other hand, the Youth Party of Slovenia received only 2.08 %. The four other newly established parties also did not manage to enter parliament. However, one party that was new to the parliamentary elections (it already competed in the EP election) came quite close to the 4 % threshold (it received 2.62 % of votes) while other new parties received less than 1 % of votes.

Picture 1: The changing number of the party MP's from 1992 to 2004



Sources: Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia: 17/90; 60/92; 65/96; 98/2000, 112/04 and Krašovec, Alenka and Boh, Tomaž (2002): Podatki o preteklih volitvah (1990, 1992, 1996, 2000) (Data on the past elections (1990, 1992, 1996, 2000)). In: Fink Hafner, Danica and Boh, Tomaž. Parlamentarne volitve 2000 (The Parliamentary Elections 2000). Fakulteta za družbene vede, Ljubljana, pages 173, 174.

The campaign and party manifestoes

The campaign for the parliamentary elections officially started one month before the election date. Generally speaking it was very much like all the past campaigns for the national parliamentary elections. It was very routine, with not many innovations in the parties' approaches, very common styles of addressing the voters, such as the introduction and presentation of party manifestos, with the combination of media coverings of the party

campaign activities and confrontations. The only exception to the above was the decision of nearly all the largest parties to address their potential voters directly, in person. The majority of the Slovenian Democratic Party, Liberal Democracy, Slovenian People's Party and New Slovenia candidates travelled around the country with their 'electoral buses', while the United List of Social Democrats used *Smarts* (Mercedes' small city cars) for the same purposes. These kind of direct approaches to the voters proved to be very popular; while it turned out that the level of public interest was very high. The parties also tried to attract the potential voters by providing them with food, beverages and live music – most frequently performed by the candidates themselves. This apparently successful and popular approach was clearly copied from the EP elections campaign, when it proved to be very successful for the winning New Slovenia.

According to some political analysts' interpretations the Slovenian People's Party used a very unique mechanism for self-promotion at the very end of the campaign. The party president, the party's candidate in the constituency and some other party members developed a conflict on the non-defined area of the Slovenian-Croatian border, where they did not want to show their legitimating papers to the Croatian police, claiming that they are still on Slovenian soil. Following the intervention of the Croatian police, the party leader was injured and, together with other members of the Slovenian Peoples' Party, taken to a police station in Croatia. This event resulted in another reciprocal conflict between the Slovenian government, led by Liberal Democracy, and Croatian government and opened up a new topic for the media. It also increased both public approval and disapproval of the party's activity. Nevertheless, some even claimed that this event in large part enabled the party to get the necessary support to enter parliament.

Contrary to the EP elections, the media, especially those that organised the parties' confrontations, did not expose so many ideological and confliction issues, although some of them tried to set provocative questions about the parties' former actions. The main party debates were organized by the two biggest TV stations (one public, one commercial). Among domestic issues, the predominant ones were: the rule of law; decentralisation and regionalisation; together with the accountability and effectiveness of the public administration and state institutions. On the other hand, a quite high importance was also given to the foreign policy issues, which were predominantly oriented into the Slovenian-Croatian relations and possible solutions to the unsolved problems between the states. The EU was not explicitly raised as an important topic, although all the party representatives claimed that they would use Slovenian membership as an important fact that had to be considered and used as a negotiation argument in Slovenian positions and demands towards Croatia. Compared with the EP debates, we could actually claim that the main issues were very similar, while we know that the topics for the EP campaign in the media were predominantly dealing with the domestic ideological disputes and less with the EU system and its politics.

In terms of campaign approaches some researchers and analysts also emphasised the importance of a very clear, well considered long-term planned publicity in the media that was led by the winning Slovenian Democratic Party. Many topics, already mentioned at start of this briefing paper, were on the agenda mainly because of the party's continuous activity. When talking about the campaign we normally analyse also the content of the party manifestos. For the 2004 elections the parties had been introducing their manifestos from the summer onwards until the beginning of the official start of the election campaign at the beginning of September. The issues exposed in the manifesto could be divided into two major groups: 1) non-political issues, that predominately dealt with the importance of social values;

and 2) political, policy and polity issues, where content analysis exposed the following topics to be the most common: economic and social policy issues, defence and foreign policy, education, health issues and culture. Parallel to the concrete policy issues the problems of efficiency and accountability of political institutions were also emphasised.

EU topics were quite important, although they were not very clearly specified. It was common to all the parties that they exposed Slovenian membership in the EU as a challenge and opportunity for faster economic, social, security and cultural development (Slovenian Democratic Party, Liberal Democracy, New Slovenia, Slovenian Peoples' Party). The parties also used the EU to legitimate their views and policy solutions, mainly in the economic, agricultural, educational and social fields. Some of them (Liberal Democracy, the United List of Social Democrats) stressed the importance of EU structural and cohesion funds the establishment of common defence and foreign policies (also stressed by the Slovenian Democratic Party, New Slovenia and the Slovenian Peoples' Party). On the other hand some very latent aspects of Euroscepticism could be traced as well, mainly in broader claims of the importance of considerations of Slovenian national identity (Slovenian Democratic Party, Liberal Democracy) although in the same breath the parties stressed the importance of the active co-operation in EU projects. The only party that set Slovenian priorities and policies above all other considerations was the Slovenian National Party, which said that it would only support the EU when it was felt to be beneficial for Slovenia.

The conclusion about the election campaign could be that the competing parties had very similar approaches and concentrated their activities on predictable issues. But it was also very interesting that their solutions were very much the same and could be described as 'social-liberalism' in the economic sense. The other characteristic of the campaign was also that these solutions and goals were more or less incomplete and frequently unclear. With some rare exceptions the campaign was not very conflictual, while even the constant disputes between the parties and their leaders seemed normal and expected. The election campaign dealt with predominately national issues and the will to preserve Slovenian national identity, which was at the end clearly seen also from the following party's appeals: "It is time for Slovenia" (Slovenian Democratic Party), "We are changing Slovenia together" (Liberal Democracy) and "Preserve Slovenia" (Slovenian Peoples' Party).

Conclusion

The 2004 elections were held under the same proportional electoral system as in 2000, with a 4 % threshold, and only one party fewer than in 2000 reached the threshold. The first indicator of potential political changes before the elections was the vanishing popularity of Liberal Democracy already seen in the EP election held in June 2004 when New Slovenia received 1.7% more votes than this party. Already at the beginning of 2004, public opinion polls indicated decreasing support for Liberal Democracy and increasing support for the Slovenian Democratic Party among the electorate.⁹

The results of the 2004 elections can be interpreted as a victory for the centre-right parties (Slovenian Democratic Party, New Slovenia and the Slovene People's Party). These three

⁹ Public opinion polls also forecast exasperated battle for victory between the two parties. The results were nevertheless a surprise, not in term of the Slovenian Democratic Party's victory but in terms of the difference between them and the party's convincing victory. The results of the 2004 parliamentary elections represent the third example of a major discrepancy between opinion poll forecasts and actual results (alongside with EU and NATO referendum and the EP elections).

parties, and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia, have formed a governmental coalition (they have the support of 49 MPs). The opposition is now formed by Liberal Democracy (under the leadership of former prime minister Rop who, despite some disputes at the party congress held in December 2004, was once again elected party president) and the United List of Social Democrats. The Slovenian National Party is once again in opposition but we can probably expect some co-operation between the party and the government because a deal between the government coalition and National Party assured the latter a position of vice-president of the parliament. According to announced and some already taken steps we can say that Slovenia has a government that is liberal in economic terms and conservative in terms of social values. In this respect and some predicted economic and social problems there will probably be a space/opportunity for a stronger left party.

This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member- and candidate-states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications, visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>