



**European Parties Elections  
and Referendums Network**

**2004 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 18  
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN SLOVENIA  
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**Key points:**

- 7 Slovenian MEPs were elected under a proportional electoral system (using the d'Hondt counting method) involving a single constituency and the possibility of a preference vote.
- The electoral law for the European Parliament (EP) election introduced for the first time a gender quota: at least 40% of each gender had to be represented on candidate lists; in addition at least one candidate of each gender had to be placed in the upper half of the list.
- No significant new political party emerged, except for 'Slovenia is Ours', which received 4.1% of votes that would have been enough for it to enter Parliament if these had been national parliamentary elections
- No Eurosceptic party competed in the EP elections. Two parties defined themselves as Eurorealist but their combined low electoral support was 5.3%: the parliamentary Slovenian National Party attracted 5% and the non-parliamentary Democratic Party of Slovenia just 0.3%.
- The campaign was (especially in relation to non-parliamentary parties) dominated by domestic political issues, while EU-related debate remained at a very basic level.
- The unexpected winner of the EP elections was the opposition New Slovenia, with 23.6% of votes.
- The voter turnout of 28.3% is the lowest level of turnout seen since the first democratic parliamentary and presidential elections held in 1990.

**Background**

A few months before the first EP elections intense political activities and events were underway in Slovenia. Together with greater economic uncertainty (on the whole worse than the officially expected economic situation measured by different indicators) at least partly due to changed economic and political environments outside of Slovenia, some political questions gained such attention that they strongly influenced the political scene in the run up to the EP

elections. The ‘hottest’ political questions involved the issue of so-called ‘erased persons’ – citizens of the former Yugoslav republics who in February 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 February 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 large amounts of 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 had become the most important political question. From October 2003 until February 2004 there were 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 the turnout was 31.5%. The referendum was won by the opposition since the majority of people who participated in the referendum supported its proposal. However, a few days before the referendum was held Prime Minister Rop publicly announced that he would not participate in it since it was a meaningless act. In a similar way, the President of the Republic Drnovšek also publicly announced a few days before the referendum that he would also not participate because, he argued, the result would not contribute at all to solving the question of the erased people. Similar public appeals to voters were made by the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the United List of Social Democrats, who both argued that a voter’s best decision would be not to participate in the referendum.

Partly connected with the events described above were parliamentary interpellations against two ministers: the Minister of Health (Keber) and the Minister of Internal Affairs (Bohinc). In particular, the interpellation against the Minister of Internal Affairs was connected with the question discussed briefly above. The debate and voting in parliament was held in the last few days of March 2004. Both interpellations were unsuccessful since the ministers had gained sufficiently broad support. But they were fatal for the governmental Slovenian People’s Party. In the first interpellation, MPs from that party did not vote, while in the second one some MPs supported the interpellation while some MPs supported the minister. Consequently, Prime Minister Rop excluded the Slovenian People’s Party. On April 7 all three ministers from the Slovenian People’s Party resigned from their positions. In the middle of April five new ministers were appointed (apart from the three ministers from the Slovenian People’s Party, two ministers had to be appointed since one was appointed (on her own request) as an ambassador and another was appointed as an EU Commissioner).

These events were mirrored in public support for the parties. According to the Politbarometer (a public opinion poll conducted at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences), in February 2004 just 18% of voters would have supported Liberal Democracy of Slovenia on election and 17% would have supported the Slovenian Democratic Party. In February 2003,

27% of voters would have supported the Liberal Democrats while just 9% would have supported the Slovenian Democratic Party. But even by March 2004 the difference between the two was greater (21% as against 15%), while the next shrinking of the difference between them was seen in June 2004 (19% as against 14%). That shows the gap between the two parties narrowed between 2003 and mid-2004.

In May 2004 events also reached a peak around a second very widely discussed question: accusations against the government, especially Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and its most prominent politicians, involving corruption and clientelism. At the end of May another extraordinary session of parliament was held to discuss this problem.

Together with these political events, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia was increasingly being described as an excessively arrogant party that, during the last twelve years of holding its leading political position in Slovenia, had lost its connections with society and, along with that, a feeling for the problems of the majority of the population. Some claims were also made in about Liberal Democracy of Slovenia being a party that had no new ideas on how to run the country.

Given all of these political events and the fact that in autumn 2004 regular parliamentary elections have to be held (now set for 3 October, but at the time of the EP elections the date for the parliamentary elections was still unknown), the parliamentary opposition appealed for simultaneous EP and national parliament elections to be held. The Prime Minister's response was that Slovenia was not in any extraordinary situation and any premature elections would not be necessary.

## **National legislation on the EP elections**

The first EP elections were held according to a specific law first adopted by parliament in October 2002 and modified in February 2004. Slovenia's legislation on EP elections differs in some aspects from the legislation that governs national parliamentary elections.

National legislation on EP elections offers the possibility to vote and stand as a candidate to all citizens who qualify as voters or candidates in national parliamentary elections. In addition, it allows EU citizens to vote or stand as a candidate if they have permanent residence in Slovenia and fulfil other conditions to become a voter or candidate in national parliamentary elections. In the same way as for national parliamentary elections, candidates for EP elections can also be proposed by parties (the candidate list must be supported by 4 MPs or 1000 voters) or voters (in which case the candidate list must be supported by 3000 voters). The highest possible number of candidates on an individual list is seven. The law established a proportional electoral system (using the d'Hondt counting method for seat allocation) with a single constituency (for national parliamentary elections Slovenia has 88 constituencies and a nationally defined threshold of 4%) and the possibility of a preference vote. According to the law, each candidate list can spend no more than 60 Slovenian tolar (SIT) per voter on the related electoral campaign (namely, SIT 97,735,080.00; EUR 1 = SIT 239.8) as in the case of national parliamentary elections.

Slovenian national legislation also interferes somewhat in the internal procedure of selecting candidates within the parties. Namely, the legislation determines that a certain list of candidates cannot comprise less than 40% of representatives of each gender and at least one representative of each gender must be placed in the top half of the list (since Slovenia has 7

MEPs this means in the top three positions). If a certain list of candidates does not meet these conditions it is considered invalid. That is why all lists of candidates (13) had at least three women among their candidates, but only two parties had 4 women candidates which was, in terms of the legal provision, the highest number possible (the Party of Ecological Movements of Slovenia and the Voice of Women of Slovenia). Women topped the list of candidates in three parties (the Youth Party of Slovenia+the Greens of Slovenia, Slovenia is Ours and Voice of Women of Slovenia).

Since the law establishes the incompatibility of the position of MEP with the position of MP, member of the government and member of local representative bodies, we could have expected that top ranking politicians, especially from parliamentary parties, would not have been candidates in the EP elections. These expectations were partially met in the Slovenian case since arguably the only five top ranking politicians from parliamentary parties also topped the candidate lists of their parties. However, the four of these were also among those who in the last few years have most heavily reoriented themselves from internal to EU affairs. Consequently, their candidacy for MEPs was expected, as was their first position on the candidate list. Three leaders of parliamentary parties (top ranking politicians) were also among candidates for MEPs albeit they held last positions on their lists.

Among all the candidates who were selected the most interesting is Pahor, the Speaker of the Slovenian Parliament and leader of the United List of Social Democrats. Throughout the whole year there was speculation about his candidacy for the EP. At the beginning of the year Pahor several times rejected the idea but several public opinion polls revealed that, if this remained the case, the United List of Social Democrats would be very unlikely to gain a seat in the EP. Under such pressure at the end of April Pahor and the presidency of the party decided that he would both stand as a candidate and be the first on the list. But immediately after this decision Pahor started to send different signals to the public about his desire to be (first) on the list. At the beginning of May the party convention officially agreed on its list of candidates and, at his request, Pahor was moved from the first to the last position on it. Nevertheless, he was still elected to the EP. Moreover, he was the only MEP elected on the basis of preference votes for he was not first on the candidate list. Given these events most commentators classify him as 'unhappy', 'a sad winner' or even a 'loser' of the EP elections.

## **The election campaign and party manifestos**

### The Election Campaign

In Slovenia the campaign for the EP elections is based on legislation governing campaigns for national parliamentary elections. The campaign started one month before the day of the elections, even though some earlier non-direct forms of campaigning could be detected, like billboards sponsored by the Slovenian People's Party promoting wealth and the future. In the name of the Prime Minister, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia sent out questionnaires to households asking for their assessment of the current political, economic and social situation in Slovenia. Moreover, other 'EU strategies' like MP's questions in the National Assembly and media conferences on EU issues were used by different parties to establish the interests of voters.

Despite the shown attempts we can claim that the campaign was more or less very formal and did not provide voters with any kind of surprising outcome. It seems that what was most surprising was the establishment of new or re-birth of some parties (Slovenia is Ours,

National Party of Labour, Democratic Party of Slovenia) and conflicts in others (mainly the Green Party which did not succeed to perform as a single party, but was once again split into two parties: the Party of Ecological Movements of Slovenia and the Youth Party of Slovenia+Greens of Slovenia). Another point of interest was the comebacks of some previously successful politicians, alongside other more publicly exposed officials, businessmen and journalists. This was most clearly seen in parties' decisions to put quite visible personalities on their candidate lists.

For the EP elections in Slovenia the analysed data on the campaign and party manifestos can be presented together, although the most common way of informing potential party voters of a party's programme standpoints was *via* different media outlets, mainly television, radio and posters, brochures, leaflets. In what follows we therefore use data which we drawn from: 1) documents published by parties as their programmes; 2) television debates on public Slovenian television; and 3) radio presentations by the parties on public Slovenian radio station. The printed media was not particularly involved in this EP election. It mainly prepared general reports about issues such as: the EP, its powers, the role of MEPs, comparative reporting on experiences with the EP in 'old' EU member-states etc.

### Party manifestos

The majority of parties competing in the elections officially presented their manifestos or other documents that may be interpreted as programmes. The only exception to this rule was the Slovenian National Party. Although most competing parties presented their official programme documents or key programme standpoints, we can see differences in the periods of presenting the official party manifestos. It turns out that the majority of parties presented them soon after the official start of the campaign. The Slovenian People's Party, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia+Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia and United List of Social Democrats were the quickest off the mark. It is quite interesting that the winning party New Slovenia only officially presented its programme in the week before the elections. Moreover, no key programmatic standpoints could be found in the case of the Slovenian National Party, whose programme was not officially available through the party's Internet site nor through personal contacts with party members. Although the party was predominantly Eurosceptic before Slovenia's accession to the EU, its programmatic standpoints as seen in its media presentations on this topic had been softened for the EP elections and only the importance of Slovenian interests before party and EU interests was stressed in the campaign.

An analysis of the formal programme documents shows there were generally no huge differences between the parties in terms of which issues they stressed. Despite the common issues, some more isolated aspects can be found such as: the status of retired persons (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia+Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia), sports issues (Slovenian Democratic Party), equal opportunities and solidarity (United List of Social Democrats, Youth Party of Slovenia+Greens of Slovenia), security and management of the EU budget (New Slovenia), Eurorealism (Democratic Party of Slovenia, Slovenian National Party), the homogeneity of Slovenian people (Democratic Party of Slovenia), the status of women (Voice of Women of Slovenia), informing people about EU funds (Voice of Women of Slovenia), more democracy and less bureaucracy (Slovenia is Ours), transportation (Party of Ecological Movements of Slovenia) and anti-Americanism (National Party of Labour). On the other hand, issues not common to the majority of competing parties also focused on these parties' specific issue orientations, such as ecology by the green parties, the status of retired

people (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia+Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia) or the importance of women's status by the Voice of Women of Slovenia.

Despite the breadth of these topics, the conclusion of similarity in which issues were stressed is one of the primary characteristics of party manifestos for the EP elections in Slovenia. At the same time, we can also talk of similarities in the proposed solutions for they were all very general and without any concrete vision or idea about how to resolve the given problems.

Running parallel to the first conclusion the fact that non-parliamentary parties, by and large, only stressed national issues is also very obvious. This can be indirectly connected with a party's interest in or propaganda for the upcoming national parliamentary elections, due to be held in October.

### Media involvement

Our analysis of the radio presentations made by the parties themselves showed quite similar issue orientations to those presented above, but the solutions to problems were somewhat more specific and consequently showed very general ideological differences between the parties. Another important aspect arising in the radio presentations and widely presented in the programmes was the personal qualities of candidates, mainly their past experience, references, prestige, positions and contacts within the EU. This coincides with public opinion polls, where respondents in November 2003 declared that the most important qualities MEPs should have were: education (38%), cosmopolitan nature(29%), reputation in Slovenia (21%), and political party membership (5%).<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of the television debates reveals that the campaign and presentation of programmatic standpoints depended greatly on the preferences of the media. A content analysis of the debates reveals that parties did not have the opportunity to stress their programme orientations too much while the journalists selected some key topics on which they expected them to have comments and therefore only indirectly gave them the chance to express their party's programme positions. Again the issues selected can be divided into national and EU ones, although it seems that the national ones played an even more visible role than those touching upon the EU. From our analysis of the campaign and the presentation of party programmes in the media, it seems that the selection of key issues also focused on the most problematic and sensitive national issues. The media opened up very controversial issues that did not seem to be relevant to the EP elections, such as: the reason for the gaps seen between regions in Slovenia, unemployment and the Slovenian economy, the rights of Slovenian minorities, environmental problems, Slovenian history and its interpretation from the Second World War onwards. The result of the debates about these issues was reflected in the emergence of conflict between the parties as soon as these internal problems were opened up. We can therefore find a very blurred interpretation in the Slovenian media of the importance of the issues and solutions that should be represented by our parties in the EP.

At the same time, half of all of the competing parties also decided to animate the campaign with billboards or large posters, with the majority using European symbols, mostly yellow stars on a blue background, while some parties also used the logo and/or symbol of their sibling European parties. Except for the Slovenian National Party, all other parliamentary

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<sup>1</sup> Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre (2003). Politbarometer. Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre, Ljubljana.

parties and the (new) non-parliamentary party Slovenia is Ours decided to present voters with this source of information. The key messages were relatively dry and unoriginal. Parties expressed the importance of Slovenia on one hand with slogans like: ‘100 % Slovenia’ (Slovenian People’s Party), ‘In Europe for the Good of Slovenia’ (United List of Social Democrats), ‘For the new Slovenian victories’ (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia+Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia), ‘Slovenia, My Country. Also in Europe’ (Slovenian Democratic Party), ‘In Slovenia is Power’ (Slovenia is Ours). On the other hand, the EU aspect was also emphasised in the following slogans: ‘Europe in the Right Hands’ (Slovenian People’s Party), ‘We are European Social Democrats’ (United List of Social Democrats) and ‘You decide: with us Europe will be Better’ (Youth Party of Slovenia+Greens of Slovenia). The billboards were generally not very innovative, although two of them particularly caught voters’ attention. The first one, seen by some parts of the public and the media as controversial, was the billboard of Slovenian People’s Party on which there were two young ladies wearing boxing gloves and a flower in their mouths, saying ‘Come out from your left corner’. The other one was the poster of the non-parliamentary Slovenia is Ours, caricaturing the party president and leader of the party list as Popeye and Olive from the famous Popeye cartoon, saying: ‘Your Voice is Our Spinach’.

All parties were very optimistic when assessing the results of their campaigns, their election expectations and forecasts for votes. Some were also very satisfied with their campaign; especially the Slovenian People’s Party who saw it as very plain and effective, even though ultimately the party did not receive enough votes to get a seat in the EP. Mainly the non-parliamentary parties (National Party of Labour, Democratic Party of Slovenia) and the parliamentary Slovenian National Party stressed their low expenditure on the campaign because of a lack of financial resources. On the other side, the same parties quite openly connected their interests in competing at the EP elections with the national elections, due in October, which only confirms our thesis about the close connections between the EP and national elections.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that there is currently very little available public opinion data concerning voters’ impressions about the campaign and manifestos for the EP elections in Slovenia. We see this as problematic for we cannot verify how much the campaign and manifestos actually impacted on the selection of potential party voters.

## Election results

**Table 1: Turnout figures for Slovenian Parliamentary, Presidential and European Elections from 1990 to 2004 (in %)**

	1990	1992	1996	1997	2000	2002	2004
<b>Parliamentary</b>	83.3	85.8	73.7	/	70.3	/	/
<b>Presidential</b>	83.5 (first round) 76.9 (second round)	85.4	/	68.6	/	72.1 (first round) 65.4 (second round)	/
<b>European</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/	28.3

Source: <http://www.rvk.si>

The first big (negative) surprise was the very low turnout. As seen in Table 1, the low level of 28.3% turnout is record-breaking in Slovenian terms. In the last ten years, 13 nation-wide referendums have also been held, mainly involving specific policy questions. A common characteristic of all of them was low turnout (the only exceptions was the EU and NATO

referendum with a turnout of 60.4%).<sup>2</sup> Only at two referendums were the voter turnout figures somewhat lower than in the first EP election in Slovenia (namely 27.3% and 27.5%). This came as a great surprise since public opinion polls indicated a turnout of between 55-70%.

There are at least four potentially important reasons for explaining this low turnout. First, political parties did not engage themselves in the mobilisation of voters as is also seen in the lists of candidates; as mentioned above just a few of the top ranking politicians were among the candidates and some were not (very) active during the electoral campaign. Thus, we can say that the parties did not sufficiently fulfil one of their most important normative functions: mobilisation. Second, some commentators and politicians from opposition right-wing parties have made an interesting point. According to them the appeal by the coalition of Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the United List of Social Democrats to voters two months earlier not to participate in the referendum (on the question of the 'erased persons') and the Prime Minister's and President's behaviour (they publicly announced they would abstain from voting at that referendum) also had an impact on voters' decisions on whether to participate in the EP election. Third, as discussed above, in Slovenia 13 nation-wide referendums were held in the period 1994 to 2004. This relatively large number of referendums organised mainly on specific policy questions may cause the exhaustion of voters with political events and their disappointment with politics and the politicians<sup>3</sup> who are elected to make (effective) decisions. The referendum is a basic democratic feature of a country yet holding referendums too frequently may also create a feeling among voters that politicians are not doing their jobs, leading to apathy and voting abstention. Fourth, the mass media devoted a relatively large amount of attention to the EP and its increasing importance in the EU, but the printed media in particular frequently made European comparisons of voter turnouts at EP elections and national parliament elections, while Britain was exposed as a case of an 'old' democracy with very low turnout in EP elections. Low voter turnout at EP elections was frequently presented as something quite normal and expected, while their second-order character was also stressed.

On the other hand, according to public opinion polls conducted by Politbarometer after the EP elections, 46% of voters saw the reason for such a low turnout in people's disappointment with politics, 12% thought that people did not know what the election was about, 10% attributed it to the insignificance of the EP elections, while 4 % saw the absence of enough respected candidates as an important reason.

As we can see in Table 2, the largest share of votes (23.6%) was won by New Slovenia, the party which received just 8.7% in the 2000 parliamentary election (the party was established in August 2000, just a few months before this election). Liberal Democracy of Slovenia received a 21.9% share of the votes. This result was, in fact, lower than expected and the second biggest surprise of the EP elections. In a sense, the 17.6% received by the Slovenian Democratic Party was also more than was expected while the 8.4 % of votes received by the Slovenian People's Party was less than the party expected; thus the fact the party did not receive any seat in the EP was seen as a big defeat.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this see: D. Lajh and A. Krasovec, "The Slovenian EU (and NATO) accession referendum(s), 23 March 2003", *Opposing Europe Research Network Referendum Briefing No 3*, Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex, 2003 at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/slovenian3.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Public opinion polls also mirrored voters' disappointment with politicians, while 70 % of voters would, in the case they decided to support a politician or economist, have decided to support the latter and only 14 % would have decided to support a politician (Politbarometer, conducted in October 2003).



**Table 2: Results of the EP Elections 2004 and National Parliament Elections 2000**

	European Parliament Elections 2004			National Parliament Elections 2000		
	votes	%	seats	votes	%	seats
<b>New Slovenia</b>	102,753	23.6	2	94,661	8.7	8
<i>Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia</i>	95,489	21.9	2	390,797	36.2	34
				55,696	5.2	4
<b>Slovenian Democratic Party</b>	76,945	17.6	2	170,541*	15.8*	14*
<i>United List of Social Democrats</i>	61,672	14.1	1	130,268	12.1	11
<i>Slovenian People's Party**</i>	36,662	8.4	0	102,817	9.5	9
<b>Slovenian National Party</b>	21,883	5.0	0	47,251	4.9	4
<b>Slovenia is Ours</b>	17,930	4.1	0	/	/	/
<b>Youth Party of Slovenia and Greens of Slovenia</b>	10,027	2.3	0	46,719	4.3	4
				9,712	0.9	0
<b>Voice of Women of Slovenia</b>	5,249	1.2	0	4,752	0.4	0
<b>Party of Ecological Movements</b>	2,588	0.6	0	/	/	/
<b>National Party of Labour</b>	2,022	0.5	0	/	/	/
<b>Party of the Slovene Nation</b>	1,386	0.3	0	/	/	/
<b>Democratic Party of Slovenia, Democrats of Slovenia</b>	1,263	0.3	0	8,102	0.7	0

Sources: <http://www.rvk.si>; Krašovec, Alenka and Boh, Tomaž (2002): Podatki o preteklih volitvah (1990, 1992, 1996, 2000). In: Danica Fink-Hafner and Tomaž Boh (eds.): Parlamentarne volitve 2000. Fakulteta za družbene vede, Ljubljana, pp. 173-188.

*Government parties are marked in italics.*

\* At the national elections the party competed under the old name Social Democratic Party of Slovenia

\*\* The Slovenian People's Party was a government party up until the beginning of April 2004.

Opinion polls had been predicting a victory for Liberal Democracy of Slovenia. Two other things are also obvious from an analysis of the opinion polls. When it was clear that the first name on New Slovenia list would be Peterle, the first Prime Minister after the democratic elections in 1990, this immediately attracted many more votes than the month before (from 4% to 11%). After some not very successful years in national politics as Minister of Foreign Affairs from early 1993-until the end of 1994, and once again from June 2000 until November 2000, Peterle has reoriented himself to European affairs. The turning came in 2000 when the Slovenian People's Party and Slovenian Christian Democrats (of which he was President from its foundation in 1989) merged together to form the new Slovenian People's Party. However, by August 2000 there was a split within the merged party and some members decided to establish a new party called New Slovenia; the President of the party has become Bajuk, at the time also Prime Minister. After the 2000 elections, Peterle became the President of the parliamentary commission for European Affairs, and later also representative of the EU accession-states in the Praesidium of the European Convention on the Future of Europe. In addition, the award he received from the European Voice newspaper for his work as a successful and respected EU politician strongly resounded in the Slovenian public. We should

also mention that some parties decided to travel through Slovenia during the time of the campaign, it was New Slovenia and more precisely Peterle seemed to have had the most effective approach. However, perhaps even more important is the fact that the President of New Slovenia as well as the party as such to some extent moved into the background during the campaign. As a consequence, Peterle could run a campaign that was not 'contaminated' by national politics. Finally, the importance of Peterle for New Slovenia can also be seen in the fact that the party received 102,753 votes, of which Peterle won 79,472 preference votes.

We also have to mention the difference in the results of the United List of Social Democrats when Pahor topped the list and before it became clear that he would be a candidate for this party in the EP elections. When it became apparent that Pahor would appear first on the party list (in April) there was a huge increase in popular support for the United List from 6% in March to 21% in April and a subsequent decrease in May to 8% when it became clear that Pahor would not appear as first on the list since he did not in fact want to be elected as an MEP.

Of course, the second place achieved by Liberal Democracy of Slovenia was also a surprise especially when we consider that since 1992 the party has continually won the parliamentary elections. Some of the reasons that account for this relatively poor result for the party have already been discussed. Perhaps we can also add low turnout as an additional reason together with the presence of only three (well) known politicians (MPs) on the list. Other candidates on the list were prominent people but mainly had no (direct) political experience: a former tennis player, a manager of the one of the biggest and most successful companies in Slovenia, the Vienna-based correspondent for the daily newspaper *Delo*, and the leader of the otherwise very large National Association of Retired People's Organisations.

## **Conclusions**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the first EP elections held in Slovenia.

These elections were held on the basis of a specific national law first adopted in October 2002 and modified in February 2004. This law differs from the legislation that governs national parliamentary elections since it: 1) allows EU citizens to vote and be a candidate in the EP elections if they have permanent residence in the Republic of Slovenia and fulfil other conditions to become a voter or candidate at national parliamentary elections; and 2) introduces a so-called gender quota, i.e. determines that a certain list of candidates cannot comprise less than 40% of representatives of each gender and at least one representative of each gender must appear in the top half of the list.

The campaign for the EP elections started one month before the day of the elections, even though some earlier non-direct campaigning can be identified. Despite some revealed interests of Slovenian political parties, the campaign was more or less very formal and did not provide voters with any surprising events. The most common way of informing potential voters about parties' programme standpoints was via different media outlets, mainly television, radio, billboards, brochures and leaflets. In Slovenia, there were two major emphases in the party programmes, as well as in the whole campaign for the EP elections: 1) national issues, above all the economy, social policies, agriculture, the environment, Slovenian values, culture, and language; and 2) EU issues, above all the EU Constitution, human rights, distribution of structural funds, co-operation with neighbours, and relations between Slovenia and the EU in general. Nonetheless, generally speaking the campaign failed to generate any interest

regarding EU topics and was frequently overshadowed by domestic political issues. In addition, the campaign was marked by a lack of any 'real' Eurosceptic parties. There were just two Eurorealist parties, Slovenian National Party and the Democratic Party of Slovenia, and together they received 5.3% of the votes.

The turnout of 28.3% is a record low since the first democratic parliamentary and presidential elections held in 1990. At least four factors can help to explain this low turnout: 1) the low level of engagement of political parties in mobilising voters; 2) the appeal made by Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the United List of Social Democrats to voters two months before the EP elections not to attend the referendum on the 'erased persons'; 3) the large number of referendums conducted nation-wide in the period 1994 to 2004, this might have caused the exhaustion of voters with political activities; 4) the mass media, especially the print media, although devoting relatively significant attention to the EP and its increasing importance in the EU, frequently presented low turnouts at the EP elections as a normal and expected situation while, at the same time, also presenting EP elections as being of a second-order character.

The unexpected winner of the EP elections was the opposition New Slovenia with 23.6% of the votes. Liberal Democracy of Slovenia's second placed result was also quite unexpected since most public opinion polls had forecast its victory. All 7 Slovenian MEPs come from parliamentary parties. It is interesting to note that the opposition parliamentary parties received a higher share of the vote (56.9%) than governmental parliamentary parties (36.0%). This result might be interpreted as: 1) a positive sign for the current opposition (especially New Slovenia and the Slovenian Democratic Party) and a simultaneous serious warning for the governmental parties (especially Liberal Democracy of Slovenia) concerning the forthcoming national parliamentary elections in October 2004; or 2) an indication of greater shifts in the levels of support that are likely to be enjoyed by the biggest political parties after the October election.

*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>*