



**European Parties Elections  
and Referendums Network**

**2004 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO.20  
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION  
IN ITALY  
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**Key Points:**

- There was a high turnout, but this was mainly due to the electoral mobilization induced by the government and by the opposition that managed to represent the election as a test of the executive, than to a real interest in European issues.
- The issues that were given most visibility were the war in Iraq, the fight against international terrorism, the state of the national economy, the country's budget and the issue of the freedom of media.
- The centre left launched a joint list under the leadership of the President of the European Commission Romano Prodi, working as a trial with a view to merging several parties in the future.
- The ballot confirmed that the elections were treated as 'second-order elections' so that there was the low salience of the European issues, the electoral failure of the party of the head of government and a better score for its coalition partners, a good performance for the opposition, and the success of small and fringe parties.

**Background/Context**

The June 2004 EP elections took place in Italy at a time of change of the domestic political equilibria. The government formed after the 2001 general elections, enjoyed the largest parliamentary majority since the new mixed proportional electoral system was introduced in 1994, and one of the largest majorities ever in the post-WWII period, relied on a mixed record of achievements. On the one hand, Berlusconi as one of the longest-lasting heads of government in the history of the Italian Republic – considering that in the last sixty years the average government duration in the country has been just above one year. He managed to bring together, in the government, parties reflecting different political cultures, such as liberals, Christian Democrats, nationalists and regionalists, and for some time to give the executive greater stability than it has often been the case in the past.

At the same time, the diverse nature of the coalition raised a number of problems concerning the implementation of the ambitious policy agenda of the government. In fact, a neo-liberal agenda – mainly supported by Berlusconi and by the Minister of Economy Tremonti, whose rule over an extensive number of policy areas has led to him being labelled the *super-minister* – is opposed by the more social-oriented and Southern-sensitive Christian Democrats and by nationalists, respectively the Centre Union and the National Alliance. At the same time, the project to give Italy a federal constitution supported by the regionalist Northern League finds the coalition partners quite sceptic, if not clearly reluctant.

In economic terms in the recent past Italy has been one of the countries with lower economic growth. The centre right has put responsibility for this on the incompetence of the centre left ruling during 1996-2001. But after the centre right took over the government, the situation did not change. The performance of the Minister of Economy has proved quite controversial and his achievements have repeatedly raised doubts even within the government coalition. In particular, the state of the domestic budget creates concerns and the government deficit as percentage of the GDP created alarm in the EU, to the point that on the eve of June elections, Italy seemed close to receiving an early warning from the Commission. To understand how sensitive this issue is for Italian politics, it is necessary to remember that it was not clear that Italy would join the Euro currency in its first period given the bad state of its finances, and when the country was allowed in since 1999, the event was finally celebrated in Italy as a major achievement<sup>1</sup>. The figures most associated with this success, Ciampi and Prodi, today occupy high status positions, respectively the Presidency of the Italian Republic and the Presidency of the European Commission. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the failure to respect the parameters imposed by the European Monetary Union<sup>2</sup> raised concerns in the political class, as well as in public opinion. In the end, this issue played a role in the resignation of Tremonti shortly after the European elections, He was even accused by his coalition partners of hiding the real state of the Italian economy.

The war in Iraq also proved a sensitive issue in the Italian political scene. As we will see it is an issue that has deeply affected the campaign for European elections. In terms of external relations, Berlusconi strongly invested during his tenure in having a privileged relationship with the United States and, in doing so, he somehow changed the established position of the Italian government of balanced loyalty to US and EU. Such loyalty represented a pillar of the Italian foreign policy for several decades, one that had not been put under question so heavily by any previous government. In particular, the choice of Berlusconi to side with the decision of Bush and Blair to invade Iraq<sup>3</sup> collided with the attitudes of an Italian public opinion strongly opposed to the war. The terrorist attack of Al-Qaeda in Madrid, the episode of the Italian hostages kidnapped by guerrillas in Iraq, and evidence of an increasing hostility of Iraqi people toward the Italian troops, contributed to criticisms toward the government management of the Iraq crisis, and also toward the whole foreign policy of the executive.

Clearly, by the time of European elections, the situation for the Italian executive looked more fluid than in the previous three years. The implementation of the programmatic platform of the

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<sup>1</sup> The costs paid in the view of the accession have also been high: between 1990 and 1997, Italy is the EU country experiencing the largest combination of taxation growth (+4%) and cuts to public expenditure (-3,2%) compared to the GDP.

<sup>2</sup> Tremonti even introduced the idea of a renegotiation of such parameters, and in 2004 during the Italian Presidency of the EU, he played an important role in order not to have sanctions imposed on the countries with higher deficit percentage of the GDP than allowed.

<sup>3</sup> During the crisis before the war, Berlusconi had a rather ambiguous position on the issue, first declaring the will of the Italian government to participate to war. Then, after the loudness of anti-war demonstrations, he withdrew from such high-profile involvement and decided to participate to the military actions in Iraq only at the end of the war, but without a UN resolution.

government proved slow and it was affected by a lack of agreement among its coalition partners. The areas of higher discontent with the government performance were the crucial ones of the economy and of foreign policy. The governing parties asked Berlusconi for more collective action for the coalition partners, and to attain this goal they were interested in achieving electoral success at the expenses of Berlusconi's party, *Forza Italia*. In their view, this was a way of effecting a change in the balance of power within the government, so they attacked the head of government and his policy agenda more strongly than ever before.

On the side of the opposition, one of the main problems seemed to be an abundance of parties in the centre left – about eight, none of which were able to get over 16% of votes in 2001 general elections – the lack of cohesiveness and poor political leadership. The opposition wanted to take advantage of a time of greater difficulty for the centre right coalition, by presenting the European ballot as a test for the incumbent government. In addition to that, it was also an opportunity for the opposition to start strategies of electoral competition with a view to the next general elections. On the one hand they focused the electoral campaign on the most critical issues of the government action. On the other hand, they simplified the electoral supply through the creation of a joint list of centre left parties – including the Democrats of the Left, *Margherita* and the Italian Socialists – led by the President of the European Commission and former Italian Prime Minister, Prodi<sup>4</sup>. It was the intention of Prodi that such a list would serve as a first step toward a merger of its forces into a new party, able to capture a higher vote share than the individual parties were able to do alone. Ultimately, the strategy of the opposition seemed primarily to be to weaken the government and to establish a credible alternative to it.

## The Campaign

In this climate, many Italian political actors seemed interested in treating the 2004 June elections as typical *second-order election*.<sup>5</sup> A characteristic of this kind of election is the *centrifugal tendency*. In fact, in this case we find that the governing parties had quite a distance from each other, and in particular, from the Prime minister. On the other side, in spite of the creation of a joint list of three centre left parties, there was a tendency for centrifugal dynamics in the opposition. The other minor parties of the opposition ran, of course, against the government but, at the same time, they perceived this joint list as a competitor more than as an ally, trying to gain independence from their support. In the end, the perceived threat of an electoral success of the joint list, combined with the impact of the proportional mode of representation used for European elections, made for a record of cohesiveness for the centre left that was lower than it had been at general elections, where a larger number of parties usually managed to form a more encompassing joint list.

As is typical in second-order elections, *time was* a factor that played a role in the electoral fortunes of the executive and there was a growing disenchantment with the ability of the government to meet past electoral promises. In the end, from a second-order election point of view, time seemed a factor that played against the government, and in particular, against the party of the Prime minister. In fact, aware of this mechanism, the opposition wanted to challenge the executive in the field of policy achievements. But also the government partners seemed aware of such a mechanism and they tried to refer responsibility for policy failures back to Berlusconi and his party.

The predominance of *domestic issues* - in this case over European issues – is typical of second order elections. This is due to the desire to make these elections a test whose outcome can be used to

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<sup>4</sup> Prodi did not figure as a candidate in these elections as at the time when they took place he was still President of the Commission.

<sup>5</sup> See: K. Reif and H. Schmitt, 'Nine Second-Order National Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 8, No 1, 1980, pp 3-44.

redress the balance of power *between* government and opposition. At the same time, the electoral result was expected to redress the balance of power *within* the government, as well as within the opposition.

As in any second order election where the institution to be elected is perceived to be only relatively important, the *turnout* of 2004 EP elections in Italy was expected to be low. This was a great concern for the government that feared it would pay more heavily than the opposition in terms of electoral disaffection and would have to face many of its own voters not turn out.. Many measures were taken to avoid this, including having, in many districts, local and European elections on the same day, and allowing two days – longer than usual - for voting<sup>6</sup>.

In terms of the campaign content of the election campaign, the state of the *Italian economy* had a prominent place, including the related problems of low growth rate, the critical state of public finances and the reform of pensions and taxation. Another issue was how far domestic economic policies co-existed with the European monetary policy and this was an issue of high salience. On these issues, it is possible to identify a large number of positions, with Berlusconi and his party defending a neo-liberal policy agenda, while their coalition partners the Centre Union and National Alliance were critical and more inclined to emphasise a social policy agenda. In particular, these two parties were strongly committed to public expenditure in the South – where their voters are mainly located. The other governing party, the Northern League, had a more ambiguous positions characterised by a mix of populist and regionalist rhetoric, shifting from neo-liberal to social-sensitive stances according to the issues at stake – for example, they opposed public expenditure especially in the South, but they also opposed cuts to pensions given the high rate of low-wage pensioners among their voters. On the issue of EU monetary policy we can also distinguish some different positions of the governing parties, with the Centre Union very committed to respecting the parameters of EMU, with *Forza Italia* and National Alliance more reluctant, and the Northern League openly Eurosceptic.

On the other side of the spectrum, the opposition was committed to various degrees to a more social-oriented policy agenda, reflecting social democratic platform of the centre left, and in the more radical agenda of greens and communists. Centre left parties also claimed credit for their effective management of the Italian budget when they were in government and they referred to the importance of respecting of the Stability and Growth Pact as a priority. This was not the case for the more Eurosceptic far-left that thought the European constraints should not work against public intervention and, particularly, against social spending.

We can determine from the economic sphere party attitudes towards European integration in general, and particularly towards the current trajectory of the EU, as represented by the European economic policy. In fact, after the creation of a single currency, the domestic economic impact of EU was a critical area for party judgements. In this regard, we find in the country a front deeply committed to the EU and claiming credit for the major attainments of the integration process, including the Monetary union. This front of Europhile parties – which has European integration rooted in their ideology as a fundamental goal, identifies with the integration process as it has developed to date and they had a preference for a federal mode of integration – was represented by the centre left, in particular by the parties joining the list under the leadership of Prodi. But also in the centre right coalition the small Christian Democratic party Centre Union was close to this category of attitudes. Otherwise, the centre right was characterised by the soft Eurosceptic stances of *Forza Italia*, that criticised a tendency of the EU to over-regulate the European market as well as

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<sup>6</sup> In addition, the government engaged in a campaign to encourage citizens to vote. Among the relevant actions, one was where the Prime Minister sent reminders about the election day to the citizens' mobile phones. This led to Berlusconi being accused of neglecting rules on the protection of the privacy of citizens.

its management of the monetary policy. National Alliance also had a soft Eurosceptic attitude, mainly because of the nationalist appeal that at some points made this party produce negative estimates of the EU impact on Italian interests. Finally, the more we move from the core to the extremes of the Italian political spectrum, the harder Euroscepticism we can find. The Northern League and communists are two clear examples of the Euroscepticism of protest-based parties, systematically voiced through fierce opposition to the current trajectory of the EU and through a negative estimate of the EU impact on domestic interests, specifically on small producers and on the working class.

Another prominent issue of the European electoral campaign concerned the *war in Iraq* and the military involvement of Italy. Berlusconi had led the government into an alignment with the Anglo-American position, and he eventually abstained from sending troops to fight the war in Iraq only after a massive mobilization of Italian public opinion, and the warning of the incumbent and past Presidents of the Italian Republic who claimed that the Italian constitution did not allow the military to participate in offence actions but only for defensive and international peace-keeping purposes. In the end, the Italian government sent troops to Iraq immediately after the end of the war. During the crisis preceding the war, the centre left opposition was critical toward the Anglo-American position and it supported instead the argument of intervention under a mandate of the United Nations. But after the end of the war, the more moderate parties of the centre left supported Italian involvement in the reconstruction of Iraq, voting in favour or abstaining on the relevant parliamentary acts. While the pacifist left-wing – communists and greens – fiercely opposed any military intervention if not conducted under the auspices of resolution of the United Nations. After the Islamist terrorist attack in Madrid and the new position of the Spanish socialist government, the Italian scenario changed again, with the Left Democrats joining the camp of greens and communists demanding Italian withdrawal from Iraq, while centrist *Margherita*<sup>7</sup> remained cautious on the issue. In the end, when the UN announced its stronger involvement in Iraq the issue of an Italian withdrawal was momentarily ruled out of the agenda of the centre left, together with the danger of an internal dispute over a sensitive issue. At the same time, the opposition proved cohesive, particularly during the campaign for European elections, when accusing the government of contributing to breaking down international alliances and undermining the role of UN. Also, accusing the government of pushing the country away from a nascent European security framework and embrace a clear preference for the United States that, in their view, only a minority of citizens would subscribe.

The issue of the war in Iraq was important in understanding the attitudes of the Italian parties with respect to European integration. As we have seen, the government revealed a preference for a special relationship with the United States and in doing so it challenged the efforts to create a Common Foreign and Security Policy of EU. In this sense, within the European Union, the position of the Italian government can be associated with the British one, and also with the one of the Aznar government in Spain. Such a position reflected an evident scepticism toward promoting a strong role for the EU in the international arena, and a preference for leaving foreign policy as the exclusive domain of national governments. In terms of European defence, *Forza Italia* is a good example of a party with a stronger preference for NATO than the EU, claiming that any military cooperation should be conducted within a NATO framework, and no European distinctiveness within the Atlantic Community should be created. The centre left was instead committed to promoting a substantial international role for the EU and considered negatively the attacks on the nascent Common Foreign and Security policy such as the division of the European countries created by the war in Iraq.

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<sup>7</sup> This party was created in 2001 as a merger of *Democratici*, Italian People's Party and Italian Renewal.

The other prominent issue of the campaign was deeply embedded in domestic politics and it concerned the freedom of the media and conflicts of interests in this arena. Berlusconi was one of the richest men in the country and the problem of his control over a large part of the Italian media was widely debated in the country, as well as internationally. After he became Prime minister, the problem of the government control over the state TV channels – an old custom in Italy - became particularly sensitive, since this has created the uncommon scenario of a Western democracy where the largest part of the national media was under direct or indirect control of the government and particularly of the Prime minister. This issue proved very salient in domestic politics since the start of the political career of Berlusconi in 1994, but no serious regulation was adopted in this field prior to the EP elections. In the campaign for European elections this issue was at the centre of political debates. As an indicator of this, it is worth mentioning that some of the most prominent candidates of the centre left were recruited from among eminent journalists of the state broadcaster, with no previous political experience in elective institutions, and who campaigned against the attempts of the government to exert a pervasive control over the media.

In the end, the campaign for European elections was predominantly domestic in its content and the public was not exposed to European issues very much. As we have seen, it is possible to infer some attitudes of the parties towards the EU, but this is more a hidden face of the campaign, than the will of parties in developing a clear European discourse. As a typical second order election, issues of national politics gained more visibility, while the specific issues related to the arena where the institution to be elected belongs were left in the background.

## Results and analysis

The results of the 2004 EP elections in Italy had an important impact on domestic politics. Looking at the results shown in table 1 below, we see that the list with highest vote share is the one of the centre left, *Uniti nell'Ulivo*, with 31.1% of votes, far ahead all other parties. The party of the Prime Minister Berlusconi, *Forza Italia*, came second with 21%, while third came the right wing National Alliance with 11.5%. Three other parties follow quite a long way behind, the far left Re-founded Communism with 6.1%, the Centre Union with 5.9%, and the regionalist Northern League with 5%. At first sight, it appears that the centre left was very successful eclipsing *Forza Italia*. In fact, if we consider the joint list *Uniti nell'Ulivo* as a real party, according to the results this party would have been the largest of the Italian political scene. This is clearly an argument in favour of the unification of the various formations of the centre left into a unitary party, whose electoral leadership on the other formations seems realistic after the European ballot. At the same time, *Forza Italia* confirmed its status as the leading force of the centre right alliance, with a vote share that was almost double that of its largest ally, National Alliance, and definitely much larger than the other two allies, the Centre Union and the Northern League.

When we compare these elections with others from the past the results seem more ambivalent. If we compare the 2004 and the 1999 EP elections in Italy, we find that in 2004 the joint list of the centre left (*Uniti nell'Ulivo*) did not gain as many votes as the sum of votes of its individual components in 1999 (respectively, 31.1% against 32.5%). Also *Forza Italia* in 2004 experienced a poorer electoral performance than in 1999 (21% against 25.2%), while National Alliance had a better electoral record in 2004 (11.5%) than in 1999 (10.3%<sup>8</sup>). The three parties whose electoral score is above 5% in 2004 Re-founded Communism, the Centre Union and the Northern League also improved their electoral shares compared to 1999. On the contrary, the Radicals of Emma Bonino experienced a dramatic loss of votes. The party plays virtually no role in the domestic

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<sup>8</sup> Note that in 1999 National Alliance had a joint list with Mario Segni, a politician rather prominent in the first half of the nineties, now independent from the major parties.

parliament, given its small size and its policy of non-alliance with any of the two coalitions, that largely excludes the party from the mainly bipolar system of representation at work in Italy. However, in 1999 this party had an unprecedented electoral success (8.5%), mostly due to the notoriety of its leader Bonino, a popular ex-EU Commissioner. The impact of such notoriety seemed much reduced in 2004 and the electoral result rather disappointing for her party (2.3%).

In the end, one implication we can draw from the comparison between 1999 and 2004 EP elections is that the two main entities of the Italian political system, *Forza Italia*, and the ever closer centre left parties now united under the joint list *Uniti nell'Ulivo*, collect more than half of the national vote at European elections. At the same time, in these elections there is wide dispersal of the remaining votes in favour of the other parties, and opportunities for them to achieve better electoral results than at the general elections. In fact, given the perceived distance of the assembly to be elected, the EP, and the limited scope of its power, the voters seem prone more than at general elections to follow their feelings rather than vote strategically, and to support minor, non-aligned, or protest-based parties. Also the proportional mode of representation for the election of the EP, as compared to the mixed proportional system in use for the Italian general elections, contributes to the dispersal of votes in the European ballot.

**Table. 1 – Results of 2004 and 1999 European elections in Italy**

	2004 European Elections		1999 European Elections		
	%	Seats	%	Seats	
Uniti nell'Ulivo (Prodi)	31.1	25	Left Democrats	17.3	15
			Democrats	7.7	7
			People's Party	4.2	4
			Italian Renewal	1.1	1
			Italian Socialists	2.2	2
Forza Italia	21	16		25.2	22
National Alliance	11.5	9	National Alliance+ Segni	10.3	9
Re-founded Communism	6.1	5		4.3	4
Centre Union	5.9	5	Christian Democratic Centre	2.6	2
			Christian Democratic Union	2.2	2
Northern League	5	4		4.5	4
Greens	2.5	2		1.8	2
Italian Communists	2.4	2		2	2
Emma Bonino	2.3	2		8.5	7
Di Pietro-Occhetto	2.1	2		\	\
United Socialists	2	2		0.1	\
European Democratic Union	1.3	1		1.6	1
Social Alternative	1.2	1		\	\
Pensioners	1.1	1		0.8	1
Fiamma Tricolore	0.7	1		1.6	1
Other	3.8	0		2.1	1
Tot.	100	78		100	87

Source: Ministry of Interior ([http://cedweb.mininterno.it:8886/europee/ind\\_euro.html](http://cedweb.mininterno.it:8886/europee/ind_euro.html))

It is more interesting to compare the results of 2004 EP elections and 2001 general elections rather than EP elections. The reason for this is that the elections of 2001 were the last national elections before the vote of 2004. In addition, the ballot of 2004 was a mid-term national vote between the general elections of 2001 and the next general elections expected to take place in 2006. This contributed to make the vote of 2004 an electoral test, that the various components of the governing coalition wanted to use in order to redress the balance of power within the government arena, while the opposition mainly wanted to test whether it could be a viable alternative to the incumbent government.

The centre left union *Uniti nell'Ulivo* had the largest vote share and it managed to outscore by about 10% the party of the Prime Minister, *Forza Italia*. At the same time, the score of the centre left in 2004 (31.1%) was far from being striking when we compare it to the sum of the votes of its individual components in 2001 (33.3%<sup>9</sup>). Finally, we can say that the strategy of a joint list, aimed to anticipate a nascent party of the centre left where the existing parties would merge, has not gone

<sup>9</sup> This figure includes votes for the Greens who in 2001 formed a joint list with the Italian Socialists, but who ran alone in 2004 elections.



beyond the vote share of its individual components. In the end, the attempt to overcome the lack of cohesiveness of the centre left through greater unity, and to qualify as champions of Europhile sentiments under the leadership of Romano Prodi, did not play out as an effective catalyst for votes.

When we compare the result of *Forza Italia* in 2004 (21%) with its result in 2001 (29.4%), we find a case of a large decline in its vote. This seems to fit with characterisation of the election as a second order election with a strong element of disaffection of the electorate toward the governing parties, and especially toward the party of the Prime Minister, and this effects appears stronger as had been such a long time since the last general election and there had been strong disenchantment with the electoral promises of the government. Looking at the 2001 general election, *Forza Italia* seems the party that paid higher costs in the 2004 poll in terms of vote loss (with a decline of 8.4%). When we look at the results of its coalition partners, we find that their electoral outcome is reversed. National Alliance was rather stable (-0.5%), while the Centre Union (+2.7) and the Northern League (+1.1) did improve their vote shares, most likely at the expenses of *Forza Italia*. In the end, it seems that the strategy of the smaller partners of the government coalition of attacking the Prime Minister on the eve of the European vote, and attributing to him most of the responsibility for the policy underachievement of the executive, played favourably for them. The three allies of *Forza Italia* could claim a change in the balance of power within the government and, eventually, they could negotiate their policy preferences with the Prime Minister from a stronger position than before.

A fundamental expectation that the second order election model generates concerns the undermining of mainstream parties and the success of minor and fringe parties. We have seen that in 2004 this prediction is verified for *Forza Italia* and its smaller coalition partners, the former losing votes and the latter increasing them. The same cannot be said for *Uniti nell'Ulivo* that maintained its vote share of 2001 and claimed to be the election winners. When looking at the vote for *Uniti nell'Ulivo*, we have to consider that as the European Parliament election is by its nature unfavourable to mainstream parties, their vote share is by no means insubstantial. This is especially true when we note that some parties further to the left - Greens, Re-founded Communism- and Italian Communists- all improved their votes compared to 2001, and that through use of populist tones the Di Pietro-Occhetto list also played as a challenge - even if undermined compared to 2001 - to the united centre left. Given the centrifugal tendency of the EP elections ballot that works in favour of small and peripheral parties, the score of *Uniti nell'Ulivo* was not so low and, in the end, even if not a historical success, can still be presented by the centre left as a reasonable middle-range achievement.

In many EU countries the EP elections resulted in the electoral defeat for many governing parties and the success of opposition parties. The outcome in the Italian case is more controversial. If we take the poor electoral result of *Forza Italia* as a clear sign of disaffection of the electorate with the government, we can raise the same argument for the Italian case. However, when we consider the government as a whole, the result was not as dramatic. In fact, if we add the votes in 2004 (45.4%) for the parties in the government - *Forza Italia*, National Alliance, the Centre Union, Northern League and the small Italian Socialists - and if we compare this result with the one of 2001 general elections (49.5%), the loss is relevant, though not so dramatic. In 2004 the electoral share of the centre right (45.4%) was not lower than the one of the centre left opposition (45.5%) considered as the sum of votes for *Uniti nell'Ulivo*, Greens, Italian Communists, Di Pietro-Occhetto, European Democratic Union and Re-founded Communism. Moreover, we have to note that in 2001 Re-founded Communism and the Di Pietro-Occhetto list did not join the centre left alliance. The electoral results of 2004 show that if this event took place again, the centre left would probably poll much less than the centre right. In the end, these elections could hardly be presented as the failure

of the whole government compared to the opposition, but only as the failure of the party of the Prime Minister. The opposition could claim a promising result, which even threatened the supremacy of the centre right, but certainly could not claim an unquestioned victory.

**Tab. 2 – Results of 2004 European elections and 2001 General elections (proportional quota) in Italy**

	<b>2004 European Elections</b>	<b>2001 General Elections</b>	
	%		%
Uniti nell'Ulivo (Prodi)	31.1	Left Democrats	16.6
		Margherita	14.5
		Girasole (It. Socialists + Greens)	2.2
Forza Italia	21		29.4
National Alliance	11.5	National Alliance	12
Re-founded Communism	6.1		5
Centre Union	5.9	Christian Democratic Centre+ Christian Democratic Union	3.2
Northern League	5		3.9
Greens	2.5	See Girasole above	
Italian Communists	2.4		1.7
Emma Bonino	2.3		2.2
Di Pietro-Occhetto	2.1		3.9
United Socialists	2		1
European Democratic Union	1.3		/
Social Alternative Alternativa Sociale	1.2		/
Pensioners	1.1		0.2
Fiamma Tricolore	0.7		0.4
Other	3.8		3.8
Tot.	100		100

Source: Ministry of Interior (<http://cedweb.mininterno.it:8890/>)

The turnout was quite high (73.1%) in these elections, especially when compared to the EU average, and also higher than in 1999 EP elections (70.8%). It seems that the intense efforts to mobilize the citizens by the government and, for opposite reasons the opposition, were rather successful. Anyway, we need not to forget that also in Italy the EP elections tend to yield a lower turnout than general elections. This is also the case for the 2004 elections when compared to the turnout registered at the last general elections of 2001 (81.4%).

### **Conclusion and future Prospects**

Overall, the 2004 EP elections in Italy followed a typical second order election model. Some features of the vote tend to partially violate the model without really invalidating it. More specifically, after three years of government, in line with the model predictions, in 2004 the executive seemed to have run out of the electoral euphoria of three years before, and to be victim of

the disillusionment of the citizens with the past electoral promises of the governing parties. Nevertheless, the unhappiness of the voters did not equally affect all coalition partners, but only the party of the Prime minister, to whom his allies managed successfully to pass the responsibility for the policy underachievements of the government. As a consequence, the party of the Prime minister was the only one suffering the effects of the alienation of citizens with the government performance, while the other government parties maintained or improved their electoral share. In the end, the vote was not a disaster for the government as a whole – actually, it was even better than the second order election model would predict - especially when compared to the failure of many incumbent governments in other EU countries, and to the electoral result of the opposition as a whole. The electoral loss was concentrated on the party of the Prime minister. As a consequence, a government crisis was triggered in the aftermath of the vote, whose final outcome was the strengthening of some coalition partners at the expense of Berlusconi and his leadership, and immediately resulted in the resignation of the Minister of Economy Tremonti.

The end of the honeymoon of voters with the party of the Prime minister contributed to the strong result for the opposition which managed as a whole to qualify as a viable alternative to the incumbent government. Furthermore, the first electoral test of a nascent unitary party of the centre left was promising though not exceptional. The lack of cohesiveness in the opposition was a problem that was not entirely overcome in these elections, where the greater unity of the parties of centre left was challenged by the other parties of the left. In the end, the united centre left did not manage to attract votes from the more leftist electorate, who proved instead more attracted to smaller peripheral parties. As predicted by the second order election model, this kind of election represents a good opportunity for small parties to gain more votes than usual, at the expense of mainstream parties.

The content of the electoral campaign was largely focused on domestic issues. It was the choice of most parties to make this ballot an electoral test for the incumbent government, and also a test whose outcome would reshape the balance of power within the centre left and the centre right camps. As a consequence, the electoral confrontation was centred on the alternative policy agendas for governing the country. It is possible to infer the different attitudes of parties toward the EU through their preferences on some domestic policies such as the economic and foreign and security policies. But this is more a second guess rather than a real commitment of parties to the European issues during the campaign. In this regard, the Italian scenario presents a wide range of attitudes to the EU, from various degrees of Europhilia to soft and even hard Euroscepticism.

Finally, the turnout was high, at first sight higher than the second order election model would predict. In this regard, we need to remember that when compared to the EU average a high turnout at EP elections is a common feature in Italy. Instead when compared to general elections, the turnout of 2004 was much lower, again a fact that confirms the prediction of the second order election model.

*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>*