

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 31 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN FRANCE JUNE 7, 2009

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Key points:

- Turnout, at 40.65%, was the lowest ever recorded in an election during the Fifth Republic.
- Sarkozy's ruling centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) was the clear winner with 27.9% of the vote.
- This was only the second time in the history of European elections in France that the governing party had come first.
- The Socialist Party lost half its seats in the European Parliament and its vote share was cut to 16.5% (from 28.9% in 2004), its worst result in a European election since 1994.
- Daniel Cohn-Bendit's Europe Ecology performed unexpectedly well, winning the same number of seats in the European Parliament as the Socialist Party and almost as many votes (16.3%).
- François Bayrou's Democratic Movement (MoDem) was pushed into fourth place.
- The Eurosceptic parties won a smaller share of the vote than in 2004.
- Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front (FN) lost four of its seven seats in the European Parliament.

Context

In the five years between the 2004 and 2009 European Parliament elections, the French political landscape had altered in a number of important ways. France had a new president, Nicolas Sarkozy of the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un mouvement populaire* or UMP), elected in May 2007. The Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste* or Socialist Party) had a new leader, Martine Aubry, the first woman to lead the party¹. There were three new parties, two of which were

¹ Aubry, the daughter of Jacques Delors, former president of the European Commission, took over as leader of the Socialist Party in November 2008, after winning 50.04% of the vote in a run-off with Ségolène Royal at the Congress of Reims.

successors to pre-existing parties, the centrist Democratic Movement (*Mouvement démocrate* or MoDem), led by François Bayrou, which replaced the Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la démocratie française* or UDF) and Olivier Besancenot's Trotskyist New Anticapitalist Party (*Nouveau parti anticapitaliste* or NPA)² which took over from the Communist Revolutionary League (*Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* or LCR). The third new party, the Left Party (*Parti de gauche*), was formed in November 2008 by socialist dissident Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a fierce opponent of the Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty. From a European perspective, the most significant political event since the last EP election was the 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty, which was rejected by 55% of French voters. In addition, France held the presidency of the EU between July and December 2008.

As in other countries, this EP election was overshadowed by the global economic crisis, which appears to have affected the mood in France more than in most EU countries. According to the latest Eurobarometer findings³, only 12% of French citizens thought that their country's economic situation was good (compared with an average of 29% in the 27 member states) and only 10% were positive about the employment situation (compared with an EU average of 28%). In this generally depressed social climate, dissatisfaction with the way the French government was handling the crisis had led to social unrest in the form of a series of national strikes and demonstrations in the first half of 2009 involving private as well as public sector employees. Rising social tensions and discontent generated so far unrealised fears of a new May 68.

The Campaign

The official campaign began on 25 May with 50 parties or movements competing in the eight regional constituencies for 72 seats in the European Parliament (down from 78)⁴. As in 2004, voting was by proportional representation from lists according to the highest average rule in a single ballot with seats distributed between the lists obtaining more than 5% of the votes cast. Only seven parties presented lists in all eight constituencies.

On the right, the Union for a Popular Movement formed an alliance with its government partner, New Centre (*Nouveau centre* or NC), while MoDem campaigned alone, as did Jean-Marie Le Pen's far right National Front (*Front national* or FN) and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan's sovereignist Republic Arise (*Debout la République*). The Movement for France (*Mouvement pour la France* or MPF), led by Philippe de Villiers, joined forces in this election with Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Traditions (*Chasse, pêche, nature et traditions* or CPNT) under the common banner of Libertas, the European party created by Declan Ganley, leader of the campaign against the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland.

² The NPA was originally created in February 2008 but its founding congress did not take place until February 2009.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_first_en.pdf

⁴ On ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, France will be entitled to 74 MEPs.

On the left, the Socialist Party campaigned independently, as did the NPA and Workers' Struggle (*Lutte ouvrière* or LO), while the Communist Party (*Parti communiste* or PC) allied with the Left Party to form the Left Front (*Front de gauche*). Europe Ecology (*Europe Ecology*), an alliance between the Greens and representatives of NGOs and civil society, led by MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit and including the anti-globalisation activist, José Bové, and anti-corruption campaigner, Eva Joly, was also formed specifically to contest this EP election.

The election campaign got off to a slow start, in part because the Union for a Popular Movement did not finalise its lists until the second week of May, two months after the Socialist Party. This led to accusations that the Union for a Popular Movement was deliberately avoiding debate, a theme which recurred during the campaign. However, negotiating the lists was a particularly complex process for the Union for a Popular Movement-New Centre because of the need to take account not only of parity, diversity and regional balance but also the claims of its alliance partners to top places on the lists. In the Socialist Party, list formation had also been problematic and contentious, with objections raised to the lack of consultation at the local level and to candidates being parachuted in.

The election campaign in France was therefore short, lasting less than a month, and conducted with little enthusiasm by the parties and received with little by the electorate, only around a quarter of whom expressed any interest⁵. Indeed, the dullness of the campaign is reflected in the fact that interest in the election actually declined as the campaign progressed⁶. In part, this indifference may have been due to the fact that people were preoccupied with the economic crisis and its domestic implications, but it may also have been because no defining themes emerged during the campaign in the way that the enlargement to 25 and the Constitutional Treaty had done in 2004.

Two events boosted levels of interest in the ten days before the election. The first of these was a meeting (or reconciliation) between the two rivals in the Socialist Party leadership election, Martine Aubry and Ségolène Royal, the party's presidential candidate in 2007, which took place at Rezé, near Nantes, on 27 May. This very public display of unity, designed to dispel perceptions that divisions in the party had not healed, was an indication of the socialists' concern that they were not making any headway with the electorate. The meeting received considerable media coverage over the next few days (until the Air France crash on 1 June began to dominate the headlines) and support for the party went up slightly, closing the gap between the Socialist Party and the Union for a Popular Movement, which had been ahead in voting intentions since November 2008.

The campaign only really came to life, however, three days before the vote with the first (and last) televised debate on the election, during which Daniel Cohn-Bendit and François Bayrou exchanged insults (with Bayrou creating a furious controversy by accusing Cohn-Bendit of having a tolerant attitude towards paedophilia) and three of the other eight politicians participating in the programme (Mélanchon, de Villiers and Marine Le Pen) were also involved in angry outbursts. These aggressive interactions

⁵ TNS-Sofres poll, 7 June 2009; OpinionWay poll, 7 June 2009.

⁶ OpinionWay poll, 4 June 2009. See also TNS-Sofres poll, 4 June 2009.

between the political personalities eclipsed the European issues being addressed in the debate, such as a European minimum wage, outsourcing, a carbon tax and Turkish membership of the EU.

Campaign issues

'Anti-Sarkozyism'

Personalities had dominated the campaign in other ways. The record of President Sarkozy was a central theme as the Socialist Party, and especially MoDem, attempted to turn the election into a protest vote against Sarkozy, who had just completed two years in power. To coincide with this anniversary, the MoDem leader, François Bayrou, had published a book, *Abuse of Power (Abus de pouvoir)*, which was highly critical of Sarkozy. Bayrou's aim was to use the European election campaign to set up his candidature for the 2012 presidential election and, moreover, to position himself as Sarkozy's principal rival. In a slip of the tongue, Bayrou even referred to this as the 'presidential' election.

The Union for a Popular Movement also put the defence of Sarkozy's record at the heart of its campaign, trying to capitalise on the dynamic created by France's presidency of the EU in the second half of 2008. During the sixth months of the presidency, Sarkozy's approval ratings had risen from a low of 34% in June 2008 to a high of 48% in January 2009. The President maintained a high profile during his party's European election campaign, in which he was heavily involved, and was also able to exploit his role as an international statesman at meetings and photo opportunities with the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, and with President Obama on the 65th anniversary of the D-Day landings on 6 June.

Protecting Europe

Against the backdrop of the global economic crisis, the Union for a Popular Movement took up once again the theme of a 'Protective Europe' which had been the slogan of the French presidency of the EU. By applying 'community preference' (a form of protectionism originally proposed by the sovereigntist Philippe de Villiers) and putting an end to monetary, fiscal and social dumping within the EU, Europe would be able to protect its citizens. Launching the Union for a Popular Movement campaign in Nîmes on 5 May with the slogan 'When Europe wants to, Europe can' (echoing Obama), Sarkozy set out his party's programme for the election. This included a rejection of Turkish accession (together with a proposal for an alternative 'common economic and security area' which would incorporate Turkey and Russia) and the establishment in the EU of community preference.

The Socialist Party also took up the theme of protection during the election campaign, both in relation to public services in France and to a policy of 'fair trade' (*juste échange*) in Europe. Some in the party were concerned about the danger of applying a form of protectionism to create a 'Fortress Europe' which might harm developing countries. Party spokesman, Benoît Hamon, called for 'temporary and targeted' protection at the community level, particularly against Chinese exports.

The question of protectionism in the face of the economic crisis was fertile ground for the far right and sovereigntists, who in this election focused more on this theme than

on national sovereignty. Libertas candidate, Philippe de Villiers, accused the EU of encouraging uncontrolled free trade. Like the National Front, with whom Libertas was in intense competition for dominance of the right of the Union for a Popular Movement, de Villiers denounced the EU for failing to protect the ‘victims’ of globalisation and of Brussels, such as fishermen, farmers, milk producers and wine growers⁷, all of whom, in the words of Marine Le Pen, National Front vice-president, were being ‘swindled’ by the EU and suffering because of outsourcing and the resulting redundancies. Dupont-Aignan blamed the strong euro for forcing French companies to outsource.

Social Europe

The economic crisis also highlighted once again the question of a social Europe. The socialists had adopted the Party of European Socialists’ (PES) common programme, ‘for a Europe of social progress’, whose priority was a European recovery plan. The main focus of this manifesto was on social and economic issues such as a European minimum wage, the principle of social and fiscal harmonisation, action against tax havens and the defence of public services. Many of the same proposals were endorsed by the ‘left of the left’. The Left Front called for a minimum wage equal to 60% of the average EU, for a ban on redundancies in profitable companies and a moratorium on all EU directives on deregulation. The New Anticapitalist Party discourse also centred on the consequences of the economic crisis for workers, with calls for an end to redundancies and social dumping. Workers’ Struggle’s new spokeswoman, Nathalie Arthaud, said that the party was primarily running in this election to denounce the economic situation and to tackle its origins, namely the private sector’s domination of the economy.

Environment and energy

Europe Ecology proposed a ‘Brussels for employment’ (*Bruxelles de l’emploi*) summit to address both the economic crisis and environmental concerns by transforming the EU into a low-carbon economy and thereby creating 10 million jobs over five years. The movement also called for a European Renewable Energy Community and for the replacement of the Stability and Growth Pact with a pact for environmental cooperation. In his Nîmes speech, Sarkozy too highlighted environmental and energy issues, particularly climate change and a carbon tax, and proposed a central exchange for buying and distributing gas.

European institutions

The Lisbon Treaty was not a major issue in this election. The Union for a Popular Movement, Socialist Party, MoDem and ecologists all supported the new Treaty (although José Bové, a leading player in the Europe Ecology movement, was an opponent of Lisbon and voted No in the 2005 referendum) and wanted to put the institutional question behind them, in the socialists’ case to avoid reawakening divisions in the party. Nor was it a priority for the electorate, only 16% of whom said that the Lisbon Treaty was an important election issue for them⁸. For the smaller parties, on the other hand, the issue was still a live one. The leaders of the Left Front, Marie-George Buffet and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, had announced when they joined

⁷ An EU proposal to allow rosé wine to be made by blending red and white wine had infuriated French winemakers, who feared an invasion of foreign blended rosé wine. The plan was withdrawn on 8 June 2009.

⁸ OpinionWay poll, 7 June 2009.

forces in November 2008 that a primary objective of their alliance was to form a common front against ‘the Europe of the Lisbon Treaty’ in the 2009 EP election. A key election proposal of the Left Front was therefore to break with ‘liberal Europe’ and all its treaties, including Lisbon. Their position on the treaty was shared by Olivier Besancenot and the New Anticapitalist Party. On the sovereignist and far right, de Villiers denounced the Lisbon Treaty as being profoundly anti-democratic and it was also strongly opposed by the National Front and Republic Arise.

The far and sovereignist right were also most vociferous in their criticism of European institutions, what the National Front referred to as ‘the European dictatorship’. Libertas called for a reduction in the powers of the European Commission and an enhancement of the role of national parliaments in decision-making, as well as an end to the extravagant ways of the EU. Nicolas Dupont-Aignan wanted the European Commission to be dismantled and its powers transferred to agencies. There was also a significant campaign, primarily by the Socialist Party and MoDem, directed against the reappointment for a second term of office of European Commission president José Manuel Barroso, seen as incarnating a liberal, deregulating, free trade and Atlanticist orientation of the EU.

Turkey

The question of Turkish membership of the EU, while not a topic of immediate relevance to the European project or of interest to the French public (63% of whom said that it was not an important issue in this election⁹) was nonetheless thrust to the forefront of the campaign by Sarkozy at Nîmes and taken up by the far and sovereignist right, all hostile to Turkish membership. At the same time, Sarkozy was accused of double talk on Turkey by the socialists, ecologists and sovereignists, while Le Pen called him an ‘arrant liar’ because he had opened new chapters of the negotiations on Turkish accession during the French presidency of the EU.

National issues

An attack on a police van in a Parisian suburb (Courneuve) on 17 May gave the Union for a Popular Movement an opportunity to revive two of its most popular themes, immigration and law and order, and thus connect with its more right-wing electorate. Both Sarkozy and his prime minister, François Fillon, subsequently made announcements about new measures against violence in schools. Although this was clearly a national rather than a European theme, the government’s action received a considerable amount of media coverage during the campaign. The emphasis given by the political elite to domestic and party-political issues suggests that they consider national questions to be more likely to mobilise voters than EU matters in the EP elections. Opinion polls contradict this. Voters interviewed on election day indicated that European issues were more salient to them than national issues, with a majority (between 56%¹⁰ and 70%¹¹) saying that they had voted on European issues (particularly supporters of Europe Ecology, the Union for a Popular Movement and MoDem) and a minority (between 29% and 34%) saying that national issues had been more important (particularly supporters of the National Front and New Anticapitalist Party). Interestingly, in the course of the campaign, European issues appear to have

⁹ CSA poll, 7 June 2009.

¹⁰ CSA poll, 7 June 2009. This figure is slightly lower than in 2004 (64%).

¹¹ OpinionWay poll, 7 June 2009.

gradually taken precedence over national issues for voters¹². Among European issues, those which counted most for the electorate were EU action on the economic crisis, the environment, the weight of Europe in the world, France's place in the EU and social affairs¹³.

Results

Table 1: 2009 EP election results, France

PARTY LIST	2009		2004		PARTY LIST
	%	seats	%	seats	
Union for a Popular Movement-New Centre	27.87	30	16.64	17	Union for a Popular Movement
Socialist Party	16.48	14	28.89	31	Socialist Party
Europe Ecology	16.28	14	7.40	6	The Greens
MoDem	8.45	6	11.95	11	Union for French Democracy
National Front	6.34	3	9.81	7	National Front
Left Front	6.05	4	5.24	3	Communist Party
New Anticapitalist Party	4.88	0	2.56	0	Workers' Struggle/LCR
Workers' Struggle	1.20	0			
Libertas	4.80	1	8.37	3	Movement for France/Rally for France
			1.73	0	Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Traditions
Republic Arise	1.77	0			
Others	5.88	0	7.41	0	Others
TOTAL	100	72	100	78	TOTAL

Source: French Ministry of the Interior

In this election, yet again, French voters produced a surprising result, confounding many expectations. The Union for a Popular Movement-New Centre won 27.87% of the vote compared with their combined vote share of 41.9% in the 2007 legislative elections (and the Union for a Popular Movement's 16.64% in the 2004 European election, when they were also the governing party). This gave them a comfortable victory over the second-placed Socialist Party (by a margin of more than 11%) but more significantly this was only the second time in the history of European elections in France that the party in power had come first¹⁴. Even so, while the Union for a Popular Movement clearly succeeded in reuniting the right, their result was less than a triumph. According to a poll taken on the day of the election, 45% of voters had used

¹² OpinionWay poll, 4 June 2009.

¹³ OpinionWay poll, 7 June 2009.

¹⁴ Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's ruling UDF had come first in the 1979 European elections.

the election to express their dissatisfaction with the government, compared with 30% who were expressing their satisfaction¹⁵.

While the Union for a Popular Movement-New Centre dominated the right, the Socialist Party faced intense competition on both its left, from Europe Ecology, and right, from MoDem, who in turn were competing with each other. Although the Socialist Party came second, it was Europe Ecology who really triumphed in the contest among the opposition parties, winning the same number of seats (14) as the Socialist Party and almost as many votes (16.48% for the Socialist Party, 16.28% for Europe Ecology). Moreover, the ecologists came second behind the Union for a Popular Movement-New Centre in Paris and the greater Paris region (Île-de-France) and did better than the Socialist Party in traditionally socialist cities such as Grenoble, Nantes, Toulouse and Rennes, as well as Bordeaux, Lyon and Marseilles. This was a devastating disappointment for the socialists and their worst result in a European election since 1994, when party leader Michel Rocard was forced to resign. While they had not expected to emulate their 2004 result, which had been their best ever in the EP elections, their target had been at least 20% of the vote and 20 MEPs, neither of which they achieved. With only 16.5% out of a total left-wing vote share of 45% (including the ecologists) or 25.5% (excluding the ecologists), this also seriously undermined the socialists' dominance of the still-fragmented left. It is debatable whether this was a collective failure on the part of the party, divided and lacking in ideas or vision, or a personal failure on the part of Aubry, whose campaign strategy was severely criticised for being negative, unambitious and incoherent.

The major surprise, however, was that the ecologists scored almost twice as many votes as MoDem, pushing them into fourth place with 8.5% of votes (compared with the Union for French Democracy's 12% in 2004) and foiling Bayrou's ambition to be Sarkozy's main rival. MoDem and European Ecology had been competing with each other for part of the same middle-class electorate, but the ecologists seem to have been rewarded for running a more positive, Europe-centred, 'neither left nor right' campaign and because of a growing concern among the French about the environment and climate change¹⁶. Bayrou may also have lost support in the final phase of the campaign after his personal attack on Cohn-Bendit during the televised debate.

The socialists, who had seen MoDem as their biggest threat in the opposition camp, clearly underestimated Europe Ecology, despite the fact that there has been a permeability between the Green and socialist electorates since the 1980s. Voter volatility, particularly among pro-European middle-class voters on the centre and left, was clearly an important factor in this election.

The Eurosceptic left and right

While the mainly pro-European mainstream parties (Union for a Popular Movement - New Centre, Socialist Party and MoDem) had a combined vote share of 52.5%, the vote for the Eurosceptic parties' was slightly down in this election, at 25.04% (compared with 27.71% in 2004), with the right performing slightly better (12.91%) than the left (12.13%). Nonetheless, support for the National Front was down this

¹⁵ TNS-Sofres poll, 7 June 2009

¹⁶ A documentary about climate change (*Home*, by the French photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand) was shown on French television (France 2) on 5 June (World Environment Day). Philippe de Villiers complained about the broadcasting of this programme two days before the election.

time and the Movement for France and Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Traditions also fared worse under the Libertas banner than when they had stood separately in 2004. It was only the votes for Republic Arise which boosted the total for the Eurosceptic right. In contrast, the communists, allied this time with the new Left Party in the Left Front, did slightly better than in 2004, and the far-left New Anticapitalist Party also improved on the performance of its predecessor party, the LCR, in 2004, when it had joint lists with Workers' Struggle.

Among the Eurosceptic parties, there was intense competition both on the left (between the Left Front and New Anticapitalist Party) and right (between the National Front and Libertas). The New Anticapitalist Party had refused an invitation to join the Left Front, against the wishes of some of its members, Besancenot fearing (wrongly) that Mélenchon's party would collaborate with the socialists. In this party 'duel', the Left Front came off better, having entered the campaign early and run a more positive campaign. The New Anticapitalist Party was clearly disappointed that it had been unable to generate a bigger protest vote, one of its stated objectives, and its result was affected by low turnout among its young and working-class electorate.

In the contest on the Eurosceptic right, the National Front had a better result than Libertas, although neither of the parties achieved the minimum 7% of the vote that each had been predicting during the campaign. It appears that sovereignist voters found it difficult to connect with the Libertas label and its association with a foreign politician. At the same time, the National Front's vote (6.34%) fell well short of its 2004 result (9.81%) and the party lost four of its seven seats. Le Pen blamed a media boycott of the National Front for the low poll, but his party was divided once again¹⁷, close to bankruptcy and with Le Pen now 81 and due to retire before the 2012 presidential election, his authority was waning and a decision about the controversial succession of his daughter, Marine, to the leadership of the party was looming. De Villiers had his worst result since 1994, winning a bigger share of the vote in 2004 with the Rally for France (8.37%) than this time under the Libertas banner (4.8%).

The system of proportional representation used in the European elections clearly favours smaller parties and all of the non-mainstream parties, including the ecologists, won a bigger share of the vote in this election than in the 2007 legislative elections (see Table 2), although in some cases it is not possible to make a direct comparison between the two elections because of changes in party formation.

¹⁷ Carl Lang, secretary-general of the FN, was suspended from the party in November 2008 after deciding to stand against Marine Le Pen in the EP elections. He subsequently created the Party of France (Parti de la France) which ran its own lists, winning 0.14% of the vote.

Table 2: Non-mainstream parties' vote share in the 2009 European election and the 2007 legislative elections in France

PARTY LIST	2009 EP election % vote	2007 legislative elections, % 1st round vote	PARTY LIST
Europe Ecology	16.28	3.25	The Greens
National Front	6.34	4.29	National Front
Left Front	6.05	4.29	Communist Party
New Anticapitalist Party	4.88	3.41	Workers' Struggle/LCR
Workers' Struggle	1.20		
Libertas	4.80	2.02	Movement for France/Rally for France
			Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Traditions

Source: French Ministry of the Interior

Turnout

Turnout in this election was 40.65%, compared with 60% in the 2007 legislative elections (and 42.8% in the 2004 European election). This broke all records for France, representing the lowest turnout in any election in the history of the Fifth Republic.

Abstention was particularly high among 18-34 year olds (70%), among blue-collar and white-collar workers (69% and 66% respectively) and in the city suburbs (*banlieues*).¹⁸ More women abstained than men. In partisan terms, turnout was lowest on the far left (68%) and among supporters of the National Front (65%) and MoDem (66%). In the case of MoDem, this was despite the fact that 89% of the party's voters said they were very or quite attached to Europe and therefore suggests that they were seriously alienated by Bayrou's campaign. 73% of those who voted for Olivier Besancenot in 2007 abstained this time and turnout was also very low among those who had voted No in the 2005 referendum. The highest turnout was among Union for a Popular Movement, ecologist and communist voters.

The reasons given for not voting related both to national and European politics. Voters abstained because they wanted to show their dissatisfaction with the political parties or because they could not see any difference between the parties. They also wanted to indicate their dissatisfaction with or lack of interest in Europe and European construction or because they thought that this vote had no impact on the

¹⁸ Data on turnout is based on TNS-Sofres and OpinionWay polls, both conducted on 7 June 2009.

situation in France or on their own lives. A quarter of voters said that a reason for not voting was that they were not well enough informed about the issues in this election¹⁹, a deficit for which the political parties must also take some responsibility.

Conclusion

In domestic political terms, the 2009 European election in France highlighted once again the ongoing crisis in the Socialist Party and created a new crisis for MoDem. Both parties have considerable work to do to prepare for the 2012 presidential election. The environment seems to have taken on a new significance for French citizens, a factor which the mainstream parties will also have to take serious account of. Yet the most striking and disturbing feature of this election was that turnout fell once again, and at a time when the European Parliament's powers are growing. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that something was seriously wrong with the way in which many of the parties conducted their election campaigns. Voters appear to have rewarded the parties that focused on Europe, in particular the ecologists, and punished those who did not. MoDem and the Socialist Party confused European and national issues and their anti-Sarkozy strategy clearly did not pay off. The campaign was too short, superficial, ill-defined, uninspired and uninspiring. In the media, drama prevailed over substance: the reconciliation between Aubry and Royal at Rezé, the confrontation between Cohn-Bendit and Bayrou and the ever-controversial but not immediately relevant topic of Turkish accession to the EU. Inevitably, the economic crisis and the anxieties associated with it will have marked this election and may have played their part in the low turnout, particularly among the less affluent and more insecure sections of the population. Yet if French political elites continue to use European elections primarily as an arena in which to fight their own domestic battles and eschew serious debate and analysis of European issues, French voters will continue to feel disengaged from European elections, even though they clearly have a stake in the future of the European project.

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¹⁹ CSA poll, 7 June 2009.