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**Central and Eastern Europe in the 2004  
European Parliament Elections  
A Not So European Event**

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## **Abstract**

The first European Parliament elections in the new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrated a profound paradox in terms of being a feedback process of European integration. At the elite level, the accession to the European Union has offered political parties and their leaders both new opportunities as well as a new set of issues with the emergence of a significant divide over the meanings of European integration. At the mass level, however, the first European Parliament elections were ignored by a vast majority of voters. This paper serves as a systematic analysis of the subject. Our objective is three-fold: to explain a lack of interest in the polls, to examine the domestic political dynamics leading to the elections and to consider the implications of the elections for the workings of the enlarged European Union. As for the prospects for European integration, it is important to note that one may no longer assume a supportive cross-party consensus in the new Member States on the EU. Rather, popular antipathy towards the EU is expected to rise.

# **Central and Eastern Europe in the 2004 European Parliament Elections\***

## **A Not So European Event**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2004 European Parliament elections were the first elections since the EU expanded to 25 Member States on 1 May 2004. With around 350 million eligible voters, it was the world's biggest transnational election. The unprecedented democratic exercise presented a good opportunity to have a genuine debate on issues such as the EU budget, Stability and Growth Pact, Common Agricultural Policy reforms, labour market flexibility, the Constitutional Treaty and the EU's relationship with the United States in the aftermath of the Iraqi War. Before the polls, the outgoing President of the European Parliament Pat Cox had urged Europe's politicians to "speak to people in plain language" and "to talk about a Europe of values and a European Union which has a direct impact on their lives"<sup>1</sup>.

Andrew Moravcsik rightly points out that the EU "is not a system of parliamentary democracy but one of separation of powers"<sup>2</sup>. But that does not prevent the European Parliament from progressively growing into a strong supranational institution vis-à-vis the inter-governmental Council of Ministers in the EU legislative process. The conventional wisdom holds that the EU can be measured against the type of parliamentary democracy that exists at the national level in Europe. One of the "desirable objectives" would be to turn the EU into a genuine supranational parliamentary democracy. Paradoxically, the 2004 European Parliament elections witnessed the lowest average turnout across the EU since the introduction of elections to the chamber by direct universal suffrage (See Table 1).

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\* The work leading to this article was part of the research project "Idealism and Realism in Institutional Choice in Post-Communist Europe. A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Reforms in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia" and has benefited from the support of the Hong Kong Research Grant Council (HKBU 2026/02H). The author gratefully acknowledges the able research assistance of Irena Baclija, Lukáš Linek, Petra Rakušanová and Alpar Zoltan Szasz.

1 Pat Cox, "Let's have genuine Euro debate," 17 May 2004.  
Available: [http://new.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_politics/3704899.stm](http://new.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_politics/3704899.stm)

2 Andrew Moravcsik, "In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit': Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40:4, 2002, p.610.

*Table 1: Turnout Trends at European Parliament Elections 1979—2004*

Member States	1979	1984	1987	1989	1994	1995	1996	1999	2004
Germany	65.7	56.8		62.3	60			45.2	43
France	60.7	56.7		48.7	52.7			46.8	42.8
Belgium	91.4	92.2		90.7	90.7			91	90.8
Italy	84.9	83.4		81.5	74.8			70.8	73.1
Luxembourg	88.9	88.8		87.4	88.5			87.3	89
Netherlands	57.8	50.6		47.2	35.6			30	39.3
United Kingdom	32.2	32.6		36.2	36.4			24	38.8
Ireland	63.6	47.6		68.3	44			50.2	58.8
Denmark	47.8	52.4		46.2	52.9			50.5	47.9
Greece		77.2		79.9	71.2			75.3	63.2
Spain			68.9	54.6	59.1			63	45.1
Portugal			72.4	51.2	35.5			40	38.6
Sweden						41.6		38.8	37.8
Austria							67.7	49.4	42.4
Finland							60.3	31.4	39.4
AVERAGE EU	63	61		58.5	56.8			49.8	45.7
AVERAGE EU 15 (2004)									49.1
AVERAGE EU new 10 (2004)									26.9*

\* See also Table 2 for the turnout in the ten new Member States in 2004.

Source: The European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

In the event, the turnout reached a record low, with just above 45% of EU voters casting ballots. The turnout amongst the 15 existing Member States was just above the average at 49%. The level of participation dropped to a mere 26% on average in the ten new Member States whose citizens took part for the first time in the elections of the European Parliament. The atmosphere in the eight Central and East European Member States just a few weeks after joining the EU was distinctively subdued. The highest was in Lithuania with just over 48%, where voters also voted to replace the impeached President Rolandas Paksas. The lowest turnout was in Slovakia, where fewer than 17% of voters cast their votes<sup>3</sup>. Against this background, parties adopting

<sup>3</sup> In sharp contrast, the Mediterranean islands—Malta and Cyprus—showed greater enthusiasm about the European polls and produced higher turnouts of 82.4% and 71.2%, respectively.

“Eurosceptical rhetoric”<sup>4</sup> attracted a significant proportion of votes in the region, thanks partly to the anti-government trend across Europe and the tenaciously national nature of the European Parliament elections ever since their inception in 1979 (See Table 2).

**Table 2: European Parliament Elections Turnout 2004**

Country	Date	No. of voters	%	Votes	Valid votes	Invalid votes
Austria	13/06/2004	6 049 129	42,4	2 566 639	2 500 610	66 029
Belgium	13/06/2004	7 552 240	90,8	6 857 986	6 489 991	367 995
Denmark	13/06/2004	4 012 663	47,9	1 921 541	1 894 346	27 195
Finland	13/06/2004	4 227 987	39,4	1 666 932	1 656 584	10 348
France	13/06/2004	41 518 582	42,8	17 752 582	17 167 379	585 203
Germany	13/06/2004	61 682 394	43	26 523 104	25 783 678	739 426
Greece	13/06/2004	9 909 955	63,4	6 283 525	6 122 548	160 977
Ireland	11/06/2004	3 131 540	58,8	1 841 335	1 780 786	60 567
Italy	12-13/06/2004	49 854 299	73,1	35 597 496	32 460 082	3 137 414
Luxembourg	13/06/2004	214 318	89	209 689	192 185	17 504
Netherlands	10/06/2004	12 168 878	39,3	4 777 121	4 765 677	11 444
Portugal	13/06/2004	8 821 456	38,6	3 404 782	3 270 116	134 666
Spain	13/06/2004	34 706 044	45,1	15 666 507	15 512 282	154 209
Sweden	13/06/2004	6 827 870	37,8	2 584 464	2 512 069	72 395
UK	10/06/2004	44 157 400	38,8	17 146 559	17 007 703	138 856
Cyprus	13/06/2004	483 311	71,2	350 387	334 268	16 119
Malta	12/06/2004	304 283	82,4	250 691	245 722	4 969
Czech Republic	11-12/06/2004	8 283 485	28,3	2 346 010	2 332 862	13 148
Estonia	13/06/2004	873 809	26,8	234 485	232 230	2255
Hungary	13/06/2004	8 046 247	38,5	3 097 657	3 075 450	20 729
Latvia	12/06/2004	1 397 736	41,3	577 879	572 981	4 898
Lithuania	13/06/2004	2 654 311	48,4	1 284 050	1 207 070	76 980
Poland	13/06/2004	29 986 109	20,9	6 258 550	6 091 531	167 019
Slovakia	13/06/2004	4 210 463	16,9	714 508	701 595	12 913
Slovenia	13/06/2004	1 628 918	28,3	461 879	435 869	25 938
TOTAL 25	10-13/06/2004	352 703 427	45,7	160 376 358	154 345 596	6 030 746

Source: European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

4 For an overview of the on-going scholarly debates over the nature of this phenomenon, see Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, *Theorising Party-Based Euroscepticism: problems of Definition, Measurement and Causality*, Sussex: Sussex European Institute Working Paper no.69, 2003.

Until recently, anti-EU feelings have been difficult to gauge in Central and Eastern Europe due to the nations' strong desire to "return to Europe". There was also a sense that "there is no alternative" to the EU or that the alternative, if there were one, is even less desirable. However strong these feelings may be, the controversies over the terms on which the Central and Eastern Europeans should join the EU have not gone unnoticed.

After the accession, supranational idealism is no longer sufficient to capture voters' imagination, whilst political parties advocating strong nationalism or intergovernmentalism have become more willing to battle for media publicity and public recognition. One may therefore expect the European Parliament elections to reflect the level of antipathy amongst voters in the new Member States more accurately than the accession referendums in 2003 (See Table 3).

**Table 3: EU Accession Referendums 2003**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Votes Cast (%)</b>
Cyprus	No referendum	n.a.	n.a	n.a
Czech Republic	June 13-14	77.3	22.7	55.2
Estonia*	September 14	66.9	33.1	64.0
Hungary	April 12	83.8	16.2	45.6
Latvia	September 20	67.0	32.3	72.5
Lithuania	May 10-11	91.0	9.0	63.3
Malta*	March 3	53.7	46.4	90.9
Poland	June 8	77.5	22.6	58.9
Slovakia	May 16-17	93.7	6.3	52.2
Slovenia	March 23	89.6	10.4	60.3

\* The referendum is not binding

Source: European Union

In fact, the polls demonstrated a profound paradox in terms of being a feedback process of European integration in Eastern and Central Europe. At the elite level, the accession to the EU has offered political parties and their leaders both new opportunities to advance their career at the EU level, as well as a new set of issues deriving from a significant divide over the meanings of European integration. At the mass level however, the first European Parliament elections were ignored by a vast majority of voters in the region. The gap between the citizens and their representatives

grows further despite a progressive augmentation of the European Parliament's powers.

What lessons can one draw from Central and Eastern Europe in the 2004 European Parliament elections? This paper serves as an introduction to the subject. We are not aiming at a complete documentation of the elections in all new Member States, but rather a systematic comparison of a few cases—Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia<sup>5</sup>—with a view to highlighting the political dynamics in the region and the implications of the growing unease about the process of European integration for the workings of EU. Our objective is three-fold: to explain a lack of interest in the polls, to examine the domestic political dynamics leading to the elections and to consider the implications of the elections for the workings of the enlarged European Union. As for the prospects for European integration, it is important to note that one may no longer assume a supportive cross-party consensus in the new Member States on the deepening of the EU. Rather, popular antipathy towards the EU is expected to rise in the region.

### **THE NATIONAL ACCENT OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: INSTITUTIONAL EXPLANATION**

To the extent that electoral systems shape the scope of citizens' choice and give incentives to some particular voting behaviour, electoral reform matters for the structure and performance of democratic governance in the EU. In fact, the setting of electoral rules for the European Parliament elections has been one of the challenges faced by EU reformers. Article 138 of the EEC Treaty originally required the European Parliament to “draw up a proposal for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States”. It further stipulated that “the Council [of Ministers] shall, acting unanimously after obtaining the assent of the European Parliament which shall act by a majority of its component members, lay down the appropriate provisions, which it shall recommend in Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements”.

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<sup>5</sup> Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic are the largest of the post-communist states. Slovenia is one of the smallest and is the only former Yugoslav republic to have joined the EU so far.

But the movement towards a “uniform electoral procedure” has turned out to be a long and difficult one<sup>6</sup>. Over the years the European Parliament has adopted numerous reports, proposals and decisions under Article 138 in order to harmonise the electoral procedures for European Parliament elections. Yet none of them found much favour in the Council. In the meantime, Member States were free to set their own rules for the election of their Members of European Parliament (MEPs). During the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, participants were more attracted to what was referred to as “principles common to all Member States”, an idea which was subsequently incorporated into the Amsterdam Treaty, than the harmonisation of every aspect of the electoral rules across the EU.

In June 2002, the Council of Ministers resolved that the European Parliament should be elected “in accordance with principles common to all Member States”. The major provisions included: (1) elections to be held by direct universal suffrage, freely and in secret; (2) MEPs to be elected on the basis of Proportional Representative (PR), using the list system or the single transferable vote; (3) Member States may establish constituencies or subdivide the electoral area in a different manner, without affecting the essentially proportional nature of the voting system; (4) Member States may set a minimum threshold for the allocation of seats, which, at national level, may not exceed 5% of votes cast; and (5) from the European Parliament elections in 2004, the office of Member of the European Parliament will not be compatible with that of member of a national parliament. The Council further explained that Member States were allowed to apply national provisions in respect of aspects not covered by the decision<sup>7</sup>.

Theoretically, the alternatives available within the norm of PR are restricted to fine-tunings of seat distribution mechanics and technical details. For example, some countries further distributed their seats in various regions. In others the whole country formed a single constituency. In some countries voters were free to express their preferences for candidates. In others a closed ballot structure was used. Evidence

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6 *Electoral Systems in Europe: An Overview*, Brussels: European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, 2000, pp.52-56.

7 Bulletin EU 6-2002 Future of the Union and Institutional Questions (10/11). Available: <http://europe.eu.int/abc/doc/off/bull/en/200206/p101010.htm>

suggests the different versions of PR used for the European Parliament elections were based on existing electoral laws and practices in the new Member States.

For example, Poland's 54 MEPs were to be elected from 13 electoral districts that correspond broadly to the country's 16 provinces. The seats were to be divided up using the d'Hondt formula at the national level between lists that crossed a 5% electoral threshold. There was no fixed number of seats allocated to each electoral district in advance. This would be determined after the election on the basis of turnout in that district. Political parties, coalitions of parties or groups may register a district list with the support of 10,000 voters in the area. Those managed to register in seven of the 13 districts would also be allowed to field candidates in the rest of the country. However, parliamentary parties, which won 5% of the votes in the 2001 parliamentary election, were exempted from these requirements. Voters were required to pick one candidate from the lists at the district level<sup>8</sup>.

In the Czech Republic, only registered political parties or movements were allowed to submit their own lists of candidates or to run as electoral coalitions. No signatures were needed. Each party had to pay a low registration fee of 15,000 Czech crowns as a contribution to the cost of holding the election. The 24 European Parliament seats for the Czech Republic were to be allocated according to d'Hondt at the national level. Similar to the Polish law, there was a 5% electoral threshold. Voters were allowed to mark up to two candidates on a single list<sup>9</sup>.

In Hungary, 24 MEPs were to be elected. Under the electoral law only registered political parties were entitled to field candidates. Each list would have to be supported by at least 20,000 voters. Two or more political parties may submit a joint list. There was a 5% threshold. The d'Hondt formula was adopted to translate votes of the winning lists into seats at the national level. Candidates were to be declared elected in the order originally notified by the party<sup>10</sup>.

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8 Dz.U. 2004 nr 25 poz. 219 Ustawa z dnia 23 stycznia 2004 r. Ordynacja wyborcza do Parlamentu Europejskiego.

9 Zákon ze dne 18. února 2003 o volbach do Evropského parlamentu a o změně některých zákonů.

10 2003. évi CXIII. törvény az Európai Parlament tagjainak választásáról.

In Slovenia, where seven MEPs were to be elected, seats were to be divided at the national level using PR-list system with the d'Hondt formula. Following the practice for the national elections, there was also 4% threshold requirement for the European Parliament election even though that was not specified in the law. Party lists may be submitted either individually with the support of four members of the National Assembly or at least 1,000 voters, or jointly with the support of six members of the National Assembly or at least 1,500 voters. Other groupings and individuals with the support of 3,000 voters may also join the race. There was a quota of 40% for both genders on each of the party list. Voters were allowed to express their preference for a candidate on the ballot regardless of the order suggested by the parties or groupings<sup>11</sup>.

Interestingly, the adoption of the so-called “common principles” *per se* did not make the 2004 elections more supranational or make them appeal more directly to EU citizens than the previous ones. As in the previous polls, the elections took place over a four-day period from Thursday morning to the following Sunday evening. Moreover, the European Parliament does not represent citizens on the basis of one vote, one value. There is one MEP for every 232,703 voters in Slovenia, for every 335,260 voters in Hungary and for every 345,145 voters in the Czech Republic, while in Poland there are 555,298 voters for each MEP. In the 732-strong European Parliament, however, representatives from smaller nations such as Estonia (6 votes), Slovenia (7 voters) and Latvia (9 votes) will hardly play a decisive role in the chamber.

From the outset, the national nature of the elections has been determined by what Valentine Herman and Juliet Lodge called its “legal basis” which included: (1) the distribution of seats within national boundaries; and (2) each Member States determining its own legislation for the elections<sup>12</sup>. In practice, the making of the electoral rules in the new Member States were national events dominated by partisan considerations. The reason being that electoral systems are matters of choice that bestow benefits differentially on political parties and groupings of a given country. It is not uncommon that the electoral systems were biased in favour of larger,

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11 Zakon o volitvah poslancev iz Republike Slovenije v Evropski Parlament.

12 Valentine Herman and Juliet Lodge, “Direct Elections: Outcomes and Prospects”, in *The Legislation of Direct Elections to the European Parliament*, edited by Valentine Herman and Mark Hagger (Hants, England: Gower, 1980), p.253.

parliamentary parties. In some cases the open ballot structure further provides contenders with the possibility of candidate-based campaign strategies. In any case, the degree of proportionality and, in consequence, the meaning of the European Parliament elections the different sets of rules created in the electorates still varied considerably across the EU.

Still, the relevance of the electoral engineering for the desired objective to engage the citizens in the European Parliament elections should not be overlooked. Unless voters can understand the supranationality of the European Parliament and believe it to be meaningful and credible, the national accent of these polls will always prevail. Herein lies a dilemma: Reforms towards a truly common and uniform electoral law as envisaged under Article 138 in order to develop the federal-supranational nature of the European Parliament elections will require radical change in national institutional and political practices across the EU<sup>13</sup>. Changes in district magnitude, electoral formula, electoral threshold, requirements for fielding candidates or ballot structure may advantage some parties at the expense of others, or merely advantage some parties relative to others. None of these are regulated by the Council's decision of June 2002. But given the extremely lengthy period it took the Member States to agree unanimously to the so-called "common principles" it is extremely unlikely that a standardised electoral procedure will be adopted in a foreseeable future.

## **THE NATIONAL ACCENT OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: THE CAMPAIGNS**

In addition to the institutional factors, there were strong incentives for parties to fight EP elections as concurrent by-elections where voters were asked to cast their ballots on the basis of national manifestos (instead of European manifestos), and on the performance of the national governments (not on the performance of the EP or the Commission).

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13 For a discussion of the meanings of Europeanisation in the literature, see Maarten Vink, "What is Europeanisation? And Other Questions on a New Research Agenda", *European Political Science*, 3:1, 2003, pp.63-74.

The transnational party federations hardly played any role in the elections. In fact, their functions in the European Parliament have not been very visible at the national level and amongst voters. During the campaigns, there was neither a proper debate between the trans-European groupings concerning the prospects for “an ever closer union”, nor was there public deliberation about specific policy areas such as CAP, the budget, EMU, regional funding or external relations. The controversial Constitutional Treaty was not really much in evidence during the campaigns.

In fact, national parties took all the important decisions from candidate selection, through agenda-setting to campaign strategies. Not surprisingly then, the campaigns were dominated by familiar party formations which fought each other on domestic themes in the respective countries rather than on the broader, EU-wide issues. It appears that the most obvious option for individual parties was to fight the campaigns on domestic problems, rather than outlining one’s “vision for Europe”. As far as was possible, parties also tried to highlight the qualities of their candidates in terms of their experiences in European and/or in domestic politics, foreign languages, educational qualifications and personal careers. There was no lack of household names from the non-political milieu. Among the candidates, there were retired astronauts, Olympic medallists, athletes, television celebrities, singers and (as far as I know) a supermodel.

Moreover, in the EU’s Eurobarometer opinion survey, citizens of the new Member States thought that the main focus of the campaigns should be employment (70%), agriculture (56%) and “country-specific issues” (49%). As such, the European Parliament elections were not going to be about choosing the kind of Europe its inhabitants wanted. Rather, for those who bothered going to vote the elections had been first and foremost an evaluation of the government’s record. There was no European election, but a panel of national elections that can be characterised as ‘second order’ elections or ‘midterm’ elections<sup>14</sup>.

But it is not true that the European issues were completely absent during the campaigns, not least because this round of enlargement has posed a series of

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14 Eurobarometer EB61-CC-EB 2004.1, May 2004. Available: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/cceb\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/cceb_en.htm)

challenges to the commitment in the Preamble to the Treaty of Rome to “reduce the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less-favoured regions”. To give a few examples:

- Enlargement has raised the population of the EU by one-quarter, but its total economic output increases only by 4%.
- The cost of employing a worker in the 15 Member States of the EU is more than 5 times higher than the average in the new ones. With more than 18 million citizens out of job, unemployment is one of the EU’s biggest problems. On the EU’s insistence, a transitional period of up to seven years has been established (2+3+2 formula), restricting freedom of employment in the EU for Central and East European citizens.
- After enlargement, a quarter of the EU population now lives in regions that the EU describes as poor, where output per capita is less than 75% of the EU average. The Commission also warns that the gap between the richest regions and the poorest ones will double.
- Full agricultural subsidies for the new members will be phased in over 10 years, starting at 25% of the level paid to existing members states, increasing by 5% per year<sup>15</sup>.

It goes without saying that the EU has presented both opportunities and challenges to the new Member States, incurring costs for some sectors of society but bringing benefits for others. But during the campaigns the EU tended to be portrayed in a negative way. Brussels was frequently criticised and the rhetoric of standing up for “the national interests” was common. This is because the national nature of the European Parliament elections required parties to compete with one another for the mantle of most unswerving champions of national interests. Moreover, the EU provided a convenient excuse for parties, be they in power or in opposition, trying to shift the blame for the negative consequences of socio-economic adjustments by

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15 For more details, please see Commission documents ‘Enlargement and Agriculture’ and ‘Common Financial Framework 2004-2006 for the Accession Negotiations’, both were published on 31 January 2002. In response of angry reactions, EU leaders agreed that new member states would get a one-off payment of 1 billion euros, divided between them in proportion to their contribution to the EU budget. The extra money could be used as the recipients wished, even as a CAP top-up payment to farmers up to 40% of the level received by farmers in existing EU countries.

claiming that these were forced upon them by having to conform to the *acquis*. Consequently, even some pro-integration parties were deliberately ambiguous about their positions on European issues. The overall atmosphere was not conducive to informed debates about EU policy reforms and institutional developments.

Apart from a difficult campaign of persuasion, there was also a campaign of mobilisation. Unfortunately for the European Parliament elections, the structure of incentives was not particularly conducive to electoral mobilisation or turnout either. In principle, voters will only take part if they think elections matter. At the national level, it is achieved by determining how likely elections can decide who will be in government and what policy will be introduced. The 2003 referendums concerning EU membership had mobilised a large part of the society in Eastern and Central Europe. But the European Parliament polls *per se* were simply not important enough for voters. Opinion polls have shown that many EU citizens felt badly informed about how the European Parliament works<sup>16</sup>. In some of the Member States, a feeling of insignificance was reinforced by weak involvement of both the parties and the mass media.

At the end of the day, the turnout was expected to be low, except in countries where the European Parliament elections were held together with other elections (such as in the United Kingdom and Lithuania), or in countries where voting was compulsory (Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece).

Yet there were national differences too. Poland has traditionally had one of the highest levels of support for EU membership, which is seen as a necessary step towards the nation's quest for the return to Europe<sup>17</sup>. But Poles in general have never been enthusiastic about the EU itself. In a CBOS poll, for example, 64% of respondents were in favour of accession, with only 29% opposing EU membership. The same poll noted that Poles were not interested in the on-going debate about the draft Constitutional Treaty<sup>18</sup>. In another poll conducted in Spring 2004 by

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16 Flash Eurobarometer 161: European Elections 2004 Barometer, 8 June 2004.

17 Aleks Szczerbiak, "Explaining Declining Polish Support for EU Membership", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 39:1, 2001, 105-122.

18 The poll was conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) during 2—5 April 2004.

Eurobarometer, the number of people who said they would take part in the European Parliament election was 41%, with only 31% saying that they would definitely do so. In big cities, campaign posters on giant billboards could be seen. Parties organised rallies and barbeques for supporters and voters. Yet still, most Poles did not understand the purpose of the election. Nor did they know enough about the role of the European Parliament. There was no systematic effort to encourage turnout and explain the functions of the election. The Polish state Radio and TV did not show much interest in the poll either.

Rather, the election was overshadowed by government crisis and questions about the terms of accession. The governing Democratic Left Alliance-Labour Union (SLD-UP) was in doldrums after almost three years in office. Its ratings in the polls were on the wane as a result of a string of high-level corruption scandals, stubbornly high levels of unemployment at 18-20%, spiralling budget deficit and unpopular austerity measures known as the Hausner plan (named after the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs). In March 2004, 33 SLD-UP deputies left to form a new party, Polish Social Democracy (SdPI), and called themselves a “renewed left” in order to prevent an electoral disaster. Prime Minister Leszek Miller announced his resignation amidst allegations about his involvement in a corruption scandal. He did so on May 2, the day after Poland’s official accession to the EU, triggering some hopes for an early parliamentary election.

Naturally most parties devoted a fair amount of energy to domestic themes in the campaigns. However, plans to turn the election into a straight fight between the left and the right did not materialise. The liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO), which was leading in the polls, proposed to forge an electoral coalition comprising all moderate right-of-centre political groupings. PO leaders believed the coalition could win most of the votes. But the plan received lukewarm reception and petered out well before the campaign began. During the campaign, the PO focused on domestic issues by launching a series of attacks on the Prime Minister and the SLD-UP’s record in government. On the other hand, there were repeated calls for President Aleksander Kwaśniewski to launch a “presidential list” to pool pro-EU votes from all parts of the political spectrum. But critics were quick to call this a half-disguised attempt to reassemble a left-of-centre front. Although some groupings were prepared to do the

biddings for the President, he wavered for a long time before finally decided against the idea.

The European Parliament election attracted a total of 19 lists. But pre-election polls suggested that only eight of them, mostly presented by parliamentary parties, were serious contenders. National party leaders invariably led the campaigns, focusing on their trustworthiness, experience, and charisma. But candidates were drawn mostly from regional and local levels because under the new rules government ministers, national deputies and senators must not retain their seats if they were elected to the European Parliament. It goes without saying that opposition leaders who tended to see themselves as key players in the next governing coalition were not interested in a political career in Europe. The Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and the non-parliamentary Freedom Union (UW) were exceptional in the sense that they presented high calibre candidates on its list. The PSL selected all of the party's top leadership as candidates. The post-Solidarity UW list featured several prominent figures such as ex-Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek, ex-Defence Minister Janusz Onyszkiewicz, and Jan Kułakowski, Poland's Chief Negotiator for EU membership.

As far as European issues were concerned, party programmes varied considerably from brief statements and all-purpose appeals to substantive policy proposals and special European programmes. The pro-EU PO, for example, called for an end to discriminatory measures against Polish farmers and entrepreneurs, a bigger EU budget for the new Member States, removal of barriers to the Polish employees, as well as the retention of the Council of Ministers voting system under the Nice Treaty which has given Poland a stronger role in the decision-making process than it will be under the terms of the draft Constitutional Treaty. The crisis-ridden SLD-UP envisaged a caring, united, modern Europe where Poland could benefit from the EU's regional development, anti-poverty and job-creation programmes. In the same vein, "Let's take advantage of European opportunity" was the SdPI's campaign slogan. The three-month old left-wing party called for a higher level of structural funds for Poland, new strategies to tackle social exclusion, and the right of Polish citizens to work anywhere in the EU. These parties, together with the UW, presented the EU in largely positive light as an opportunity for Poland.

On the other hand, Self-Defence (Samoobrona), the League of Polish Families (LPR) and, to a lesser extent, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) made Euroscepticism the mainstay of the campaign. Self-Defence leader Andrzej Lepper called for a complete re-negotiation of the accession terms and eventual withdrawal from the EU if the new terms were still unsatisfactory. Another radical Eurosceptical party, the Catholic LPR, had categorically rejected EU membership on nationalist-ideological grounds during the 2003 referendum, as its slogan “Yesterday Moscow, Today Brussels” suggested. It retained its hostility towards the EU in this election. For example, one LPR candidate campaigned with a powerful message: “I will never betray my country!” Both parties saw the EU more as a threat to the Polish national interests than an opportunity. For its part, the more moderate PiS championed what it called “a Europe for Solidaristic Nations”, whereby strong re-distributive European policies were purported to reinforce the independence of the poorer nations. In its view, Poland’s terms of accession were not good enough but it would need a change of government to sort things out. Both the PiS and LPR were strong advocates for an explicit reference to Christian values in the draft Constitutional Treaty. The rightist parties also pledged to reject any moves towards the construction of a European “super-state”.

In the Czech Republic, 31 parties joined the campaign, including the Independent (Erotic) Initiative led by a former adult entertainment star, the Ostrava-Is-Having-a-Good-Time Party and the Czech Crown, a monarchist party. Some of the contenders were counting on the financial compensation to parties obtaining more than 1% of the votes. Moreover, according to the electoral law, they were given altogether 14 hours of free air-time on the public television and radio channels, to be divided evenly among themselves<sup>19</sup>.

Euroscepticism was evident across the political spectrum from the left to the right. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) has always been a leading Eurosceptical political force in the region. In this campaign, the ODS restated its preference for a multi-speed, intergovernmental model for the EU. The party disapproved Europe’s federalization and those supranational elements in the draft Constitutional Treaty. It promised to defend the nation’s interests in the EU not only by objecting to the emergence of a

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19 For more details, see <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ep2004/ep36?xjazyk=CZ>

common EU fiscal, taxation and welfare policy, but also by calling for a more deregulated common agricultural market and the fastest possible withdrawal of obstacles to movement of Czech people and services.

Apart from the ODS, the populist Movement of Independents (Nezávislí) was not satisfied with the terms of accession, which in its view had been compromised by the left-wing government's desire to enter the EU "as fast as possible, no matter the costs". The Movement stood up for the interests of regions, cities and municipalities and called for consistent control over the use of EU funds and an end to unfair agricultural measures against Czech producers. Former Director of TV NOVA Vladimír Železný and journalist Jana Bobošíková led the Movement's list. Other candidates were mainly mayors and councilors of small towns, as well as villages of up to 5,000 inhabitants.

In a similar vein, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) highlighted what it saw the unfavourable position of the Czech Republic within the EU as a result of the one-sided accession negotiations. The Communists' manifesto also criticized the domination of the biggest Member States, the undue influence exercised by the European bureaucracy and the growing remit of the European legislation.

On the other hand, the pro-EU camp was represented by the three-party coalition government including the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the Christian and Democratic Party-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US-DEU). It was this pro-EU coalition that oversaw the accession negotiations and brought the Czech Republic into the EU.

The ČSSD regarded the Czech accession into the EU as a unique opportunity for socioeconomic development and for the strengthening of national security. The party's programme reflected a strong pro-EU vision by demanding common foreign, security and defence policies, concerted measures against international terrorism, organised crime, illegal migration and economic crimes, closer cooperation between Europe's intelligence services, police and justice. The ČSSD called for the development of a European welfare model, the continuation of common agricultural policy reform and a proactive regional development policy.

The US-DEU led a four-party electoral coalition, the Union of Liberal Democrats (ULD), and supported deregulation of the common market, knowledge-based economy, and the faster adoption of the euro by the Czech Republic. It advocated the establishment of a new EU body for research and development in Prague, as well as the removal of barriers to free movement of Czech citizens in the EU labour market. The Liberal Democrats went on to propose political reforms aiming at the creation of a bi-cameral European Parliament, a directly elected European President (for ex-President Václav Havel), and the establishment of real parliamentary democracy at the European level.

Another pro-EU party, the KDU-ČSL, called for a proactive social market economic strategy based on systematic support for education and research, favourable environment for small and medium enterprises, better structural policy and the harmonisation of the legal and administrative arrangements for tax collection across the EU. The party supported the establishment of the European Ministry of Foreign Affairs and closer collaboration between the EU and the NATO.

Finally, the Coalition Association of Independents—European Democrats (SNK-ED) presented a very short, one-page manifesto. Led by former Foreign Minister Jozef Zieleniec, the association was against what it called a “double-speed Europe” where the Czech Republic would continue to suffer from discriminatory measures. It called for re-negotiation of the accession terms that contradicted the EU principles of free market, fair competition and equal opportunities. It advocated a stronger common foreign and security policy as a pillar of, not as a rival to, NATO.

During the Czech campaigns, European issues were intertwined with domestic issues. The government’s record on the economic front was specifically targeted. The ČSSD-led coalition has presided over a new round of economic and financial imbalances involving high levels of unemployment, rapid rise of public spending on social welfare, housing and transport, slower GDP growth, high budget deficit and growing public debt. Austerity measures and tax reforms are being implemented in order to bring deficit and public debt under control<sup>20</sup>. It is hoped that the country would be

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20 For more details, see Libor Dušek and Štěpán Jurajda (eds), *Czech Republic 2003/2004: Entering the EU*, Prague: CERGE-EI, 2004.

able to meet the Maastricht criteria for the introduction of the single currency by 2010. All this contributed to an anti-government mood in general and a growing disillusionment with the ČSSD in particular. According to pre-election polls, six parties would share the seats in the European Parliament, including the ODS (29%), KSČM (14%), ČSSD (13%), the Movement of Independents (8%), KDU-ČSL (7%) and the SNK-ED (5%)<sup>21</sup>.

In Hungary, the campaigns were characterized by negative party propaganda and a lack of voters' interest. The main parties made "trustworthiness" the central theme in this election. The conservative Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz-MPSZ) tried to turn this election into a confidence vote on Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy and his Socialist-Liberal government. The party launched the campaign with a "National Petition" to attack the government's fiscal policy, economic policy and hospital privatization programme. According to the party, the petition enjoyed the support of more than one million Hungarians. Fidesz leader Viktor Orbán also criticized the government's policy towards ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. On another occasion, he called for the withdrawal of Hungarian troops from Iraq. Fidesz's programme, entitled "We can only succeed together", expressed the party's ambivalence towards the EU in a "yes...but" manner. Fidesz's flirting with anti-EU sentiments was a temporary aberration from its otherwise strong pro-EU membership and pro-integration positions. In the words of Zoltán Pokorni, Deputy President of Fidesz, "Hungary joined the EU in a very difficult period, because its people no longer enjoy that predictability and daily security they once did"<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, the governing Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) stressed the positive economic results of the Medgyessy government. The party ran full-page advertisements with a slogan reading "Let's stop Fidesz's factory of lies together!" The Prime Minister cited as achievements increases in pensions and family allowances, investment in education, and pay rise in public healthcare and education sectors. Furthermore, the MSZP's commitment to European integration was clearly stronger than that of the Fidesz. The Prime Minister was quoted as saying "Can the people trust those who said there is life outside the EU but are now jostling amongst

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21 Available: [www.czech-tv.cz/specialy/volby-ep/predvolebni1/2/3/4.php](http://www.czech-tv.cz/specialy/volby-ep/predvolebni1/2/3/4.php)

22 Quoted in The Budapest Sun, June 3-9, 2004, p.7.

themselves be first into the European Parliament?”<sup>23</sup> Claims and counter-claims were made in a parliamentary debate initiated by the opposition Fidesz in the last week of the campaign period. But the government was roundly criticized for generating high budget deficits which would have to be sorted out with unpopular spending cuts and public sector reform.

However, the Socialists also demonstrated its readiness to take a tough stance towards the EU if necessary. During the campaign, the Prime Minister told visiting Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern that the principle of “one country, one commissioner” and the retention of the Nice voting system were the only way to encourage big and small countries to work together. Moreover, Hungary decided to apply reciprocal measures to Member States which place restrictions on Hungarian workers after the accession. Defending the government’s position, Foreign Ministry spokesman Tamás Tóth contended that Hungary was “just reacting to, not initiating, unreasonable limitations on the free movement of Hungarian workers”<sup>24</sup>.

The MSZP’s junior partner in government, the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), stood independently. By the same token, the right-wing Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) presented itself as the “third force” in contrast to the two largest parties. The SZDSZ Mayor of Budapest Gábor Demszky led the party’s candidates. The MDF list was led by the party leader Ibolya Dávid. She has consistently been the most popular politician in opinion polls.

Other well-known candidates included former Prime Minister Gyula Horn and Foreign Minister László Kovács. Both of them represented the MSZP. In fact, there were doubts about the candidature of national political figures who almost certainly were not going to the European Parliament. The Supreme Court had found nothing wrong with such practice. Pre-election polls in Hungary suggested that a 46% turnout was possible. The polls also predicted a very close race between the MSZP (39-46%) and the Fidesz (42-49%), with the SZDSZ (6-7%) trailing far behind in the third

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23 The Budapest Times, May 17-23, 2004, p.2.

24 The Budapest Times, May 24-30, 2004, p.3.

place. The MDF was hovering just below the 5% threshold<sup>25</sup>. The four parliamentary parties were joined by the radical right-wing Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP), the Communist Workers' Party (Munkáspárt), the Hungarian National Alliance (MNS), and the centrist Social Democratic Party.

In Slovenia, seven parliamentary and six non-parliamentary parties and groupings fielded 91 candidates for the seven seats in the European Parliament. The major contenders included the joint list of the ruling Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS), the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD), the People's Party (SLS), New Slovenia—Christian People's Party (NSi), the Social Democratic Party (SDS), the Party of the Young (SMS), and the National Party (SNS)<sup>26</sup>.

It should be noted that Slovenia gained independence for the first time in 1991. Being the youngest country in Europe, it is natural for political leaders to capitalise on the rhetoric of national interests in the context of European integration. As the Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel put it, “whoever will represent Slovenia in Brussels should be first and foremost the representative of the nation, whilst party ideology should be in the second place”<sup>27</sup>. However, radical Euroscepticism would do more harm than good to the small and open economy that Slovenia is. Thus, all the major parties saw Slovenia's participation in the EU as mutually beneficial. They saw in the EU both opportunities and difficulties for the Slovene economy and ordinary people. Still, two lists took a stronger nationalist stance. Zmago Jelinčič, President of the SNS party, portrayed himself as “the defender of Slovenian national rights in EU”. For its part, the non-parliamentary Party of Slovenian People pledged to defend the national interests in the European Parliament by “keeping an eye on other Slovenian MEPs”.

By and large, the campaign in Slovenia was a low-key affair. Most of the contending parties produced brief and general statements to re-assure voters of their determination to defend Slovenian national interests in the EU. There were no strong disagreements between the parties. News about the election tended to be repetitive

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25 Reported in *The Budapest Times*, May 31-June 6, 2004, p. 2. See also *The Budapest Times*, June 7-13, 2004, p.3.

26 For further details, see <http://www.volitve.gov.si/>.

27 Quoted in “Boj za Evropo: Kdo je Ke na listah za evropski parlament?”, *Mladina*, May 17, 2004.

with simple information such as names of the candidates, their chances of winning seats or the pay package for Slovene MEPs. Few journalists wrote seriously about the programmes of parties, even less about the workings of the European Parliament. During the campaign, there were altogether 12 televised debates on the public “Televizija Slovenija 1” and “Televizija Slovenija 2”, as well as the commercial “POP TV”. But none of these debates seemed to have aroused the public’s interest in the election. Pre-elections polls indicated a low turnout of 32%-35%. An opinion poll conducted a week before the elections by Graliteo indicated a clear lead by the governing LDS—DeSUS coalition (15.7%). In the same poll, the SDS came second (10.6%), NSi came third (7.1%) and the ZLSD came fourth (6.6%). In addition, the SLS and SNS would also clear the 4% electoral threshold<sup>28</sup>. These parliamentary parties had recruited well-respected candidates in the election. As we shall see below, the personal qualities of these candidates turned out to be a decisive factor in the electoral outcome.

## **RESULTS: LOW TURNOUT, EUROSCEPTISM AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT TREND**

The turnout in the 2004 European Parliament elections registered a new low. For the second time in a row, the level of participation was below 50%. The higher turnout in Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Italy was attained with the help of legal traditions of compulsory or quasi-compulsory voting<sup>29</sup>.

The lack of enthusiasm in European Parliament elections is not a novel phenomenon. The European polls have long been regarded as “second order elections”, the importance of which is no more than local elections or by-elections in the Member States. But the growing “Party of Abstention”<sup>30</sup>—a term coined by Pascal Delwit after the 1999 polls—is no doubt a worrying development, not least because the mood of apathy was partly attributable to the growing disillusionment with the EU. The

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28 Available: [www.graliteo.si](http://www.graliteo.si)

29 Richard Rose, “Europe Expands, Turnout Falls: The Significance of the 2004 European Parliament Election”, 2004, p.5 (manuscript).

30 Pascal Delwit, “Electoral Participation and the European Poll: A Limited Legitimacy”, in *Europe at the Polls: The European Elections of 1999*, edited by Pascal Perrineau, Gérard Grunberg, and Colette Ysmal (New York: Palgrave, 2002 ), p.207.

former Enlargement Commissioner Guenter Verheugen reportedly warned that “a low turnout everywhere could produce very strange results and even result in anti-European organisations being elected”<sup>31</sup>.

His fear was borne out by the fact that in Central and East Europe, where less people now describe the EU as “a good thing” than a year ago, the Eurosceptical/pro-sovereignty message won over many voters. Table 4 shows that people in Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland were increasingly negative about the EU. In Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, Euroscepticism was never a taboo for mainstream parties. Table 5 further reveals a strong tendency for abstention in the European Parliament elections. Whether voters were “rationally ignorant” or simply inadequately informed about the elections, it is possible to say that the pre-accession consensus on the EU has been undermined in the new Member States.

**Table 4: Public Perception of the EU in in Central & Eastern Europe (%)**

<b>Country Feb—March 2004</b>	<b>EU is a good thing</b>	<b>EU is a bad thing</b>	<b>Change from Autumn 2003</b>
Czech Republic	41	17	-2.6
Estonia	31	21	-7.8
Hungary	45	15	-11.2
Latvia	33	22	-12.9
Lithuania	52	12	-3.7
Poland	42	18	-10.1
Slovakia	46	9	-11.6
Slovenia	40	13	-9.4

Source: *Eurobarometer EB61-CC-EB 2004.1*, May 2004.

Available: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/cceb\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/cceb_en.htm)

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31 Quoted in “Irish and Czechs in European Vote”, June 11, 2004.  
Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3796587.stm>

*Table 5: Forecast of Turnout in Central & Eastern Europe (%)*

<b>Country Feb—March 2004</b>	<b>Likely to vote (definitely voting)</b>	<b>Somewhat likely to vote</b>	<b>Not intended to vote</b>
Czech Republic	42 (24)	25	21
Estonia	34 (22)	27	29
Hungary	60 (47)	18	18
Latvia	48 (35)	18	21
Lithuania	45 (26)	21	29
Poland	41 (31)	25	24
Slovakia	49 (32)	25	17
Slovenia	54 (34)	25	21

Source: *Eurobarometer EB61-CC-EB 2004.1*, May 2004.

Available: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/cceb\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/cceb_en.htm)

In the newly elected European Parliament, the “supranationalism versus nationalism” division is expected to intensify before the upcoming referendums on the EU Constitutional Treaty. On the one hand, the overall balance of the 732-member European Parliament was not radically different from the previous terms, with the centre-right European People’s Party being the biggest group (268 seats), followed by the European Socialists (200 seats). In an increasingly diverse and disparate EU, it is reassuring to see that broadly pro-integration parties will still be able to dominate the decision-making process. On the other hand, the Eurosceptics (also known as Eurorealists or Eurocritics during the campaigns) scored their best results ever in the 2004 polls, thanks partly to media publicity and a deep-seated ambivalence about further deepening and widening of the EU in many parts of the continent. The British Conservatives, the Czech ODS and the Hungarian Fidesz-MPSZ, who are officially affiliated with the broadly pro-integration EPP, have spoken out against “a federal Europe”. They will be able to find support in four other openly anti-EU political groupings that are characterised by their stance against the Constitutional Treaty and further integration along supranational lines. These include the European United Left / Nordic Green Left on the far left, a group of ten “Non-Affiliated” MEPs from Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, as well as the Union for Europe of Nations and the new parliamentary group “Independence and Democracy”<sup>32</sup> on the right (See Table 6).

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<sup>32</sup> “Independence and Democracy” was established after the elections by the UK Independent Party with the help of the Polish LPR.

**Table 6: Distribution of Central & East European MEPs in Transnational Political Groups**

Political Group in European Parliament (Ideological Position)	CEE Members (Total Membership)
EEP-ED: European People's Party-European Democrats (Centre-Right)	66 (268)
PES: Party of European Socialists (Socialists)	28 (200)
ALDE: European Liberals, Democratic and Reform Party (Liberals)	18 (88)
Greens/EFA: Greens / European Free Alliance (Greens and regionalists / nationalists)	1 (42)
EUL/NGL: European United Left / Nordic Green Left (Far Left):	6 (41)
IND/DEM: Independent and Democracy (Eurosceptics)	11 (37)
UEN: Europe of Democracies and Diversities (Eurosceptics)	13 (27)
NA: Non-Affiliated (Eurosceptics)	10 (29)

Source: The European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

But given the unequivocally national nature of the polls, domestic political dynamics must be held ultimately responsible for both the dismal turnout and the electoral outcomes in individual Member States. In reality, the elections to the European Parliament was more about what people thought about the incumbent governments than about the future of the EU. On this occasion, governing parties across Europe received significant protest votes against them. The anti-government tendency was evident in Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, and Slovenia.

In Poland, electoral mobilisation was an uphill battle from the start against a backdrop of corruption scandals involving the government, the split of the governing party, and 20% unemployment. Many Poles, having lost faith in the entire political establishment, disengaged themselves from the campaigns. President Alexander Kwaśniewski called Poland's 20.9% turnout "the defect of our civil society and democracy"<sup>33</sup>. It was the second lowest in EU and the worst turnout ever for a nationwide election since 1989.

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33 Rzeczpospolita, June 14, 2004.

However, the impact of protest votes was clearly felt in the results, in which governing SLD-UP came only fifth with 9.3% of the votes and five seats. Although some pre-election polls suggested that the SLD-UP would fail to clear the 5% threshold, their organisational base turned out to be stronger than expected. The SLD-UP's major rival, the liberal-conservative PO, topped the poll with 24% and 15 seats. Commenting on the extremely low turnout, PO leader Donald Tusk believed that most Polish citizens would stay out of politics unless politicians are being held accountable more directly to their constituents under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system with single-member constituencies. Tusk was referring to the PO's intention to introduce a new electoral system for the national parliament, the Sejm, rather than that for the European Parliament.

But the PO's victory was overshadowed by the performance of Eurosceptical right-wing parties and the populists. For example, the Catholic, anti-EU LPR did surprisingly well with 15.9% and ten seats. The party campaigned against Poland's accession in the 2003 referendum and argued that Poland would have to quit the EU to regain real independence. During the campaign, LPR leader Roman Giertych would prefer to be known as a "pragmatist" and said his party would no longer support Poland's withdrawal from the EU because "the Polish nation decided otherwise (in the 2003 referendum)." In the European Parliament, the LPR has joined forces with the UK Independent Party to form a clearly anti-integration fraction known as "Independent and Democracy".

Another strong anti-EU party from Poland, Self-Defence, gained six seats. Its MEPs did not join any transnational groups in the European Parliament. The PiS is a moderate right-wing party. It gained 12.7% of the votes and seven seats. Both the PiS and Self-Defence apparently lost votes to the LPR. In the 2003 referendum on Poland's accession to the EU, exit polls found that two-thirds of LPR supporters, together with almost half of Self-Defence followers were against EU membership, whereas above 90% of PO and SLD voters were in favour<sup>34</sup>.

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34 Rzeczpospolita, June 9, 2003.

The remaining seats were shared between three smaller parties. The PSL and the three-month old SdPI—a splinter group from the governing SLD-UP, won four and three seats respectively. The extra-parliamentary liberal party UW got 7.3% of the votes and four seats. In other words, Poland’s voters are now represented by eight parties in the European Parliament, but only the SLD-UP, the PO, and the UW are in favour of European integration as a matter of principle (See Table 7). A total of 17 Sejm deputies and four senators were elected to the European Parliament. They would have to give up their seats in the national parliament under the new incompatibility rule.

**Table 7: Results of European Parliament Elections 2004 in Poland**

Parties	%	Seats	EPP-ED	PES	ALDE	Greens/EFA	EUL/NGL	IND/DEM	UEN	NA
PO	24	15	15							
LPR	15.9	10						10		
PiS	12.7	7							7	
SO	10.8	6								6
SLD-UP	9.3	5		5						
UW	7.3	4			4					
PSL	6.3	4	4							
SdPI	5.3	3		3						
Others	8.4	0								
Total	100	54	19	8	4	0	0	10	7	6

Source: The European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

Turning to the Czech Republic, “the anti-integration parties won” was Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla’s verdict. His social democratic ČSSD received less than 9% of the vote and merely two seats (out of 24). Czech political parties are divided over the future prospects of the EU in terms a pro-integration—federalist orientation and anti-integration—intergovernmentalist orientation. This division corresponds roughly to the more familiar “Euroenthusiasts vs. Eurosceptics” pattern. In view of the party manifestoes, the ČSSD, the KDU-ČSL, the Liberals, and the SNK-ED belonged to the first group. The pro-integration parties took only seven seats with 34% of the vote. On the other hand, the anti-integration ODS, the KSČM and the Independents (Nezávislí) did quite well with 61% of the vote and 17 seats in the European Parliament.

The European poll in the Czech Republic was also marked by a record low turnout. Only 28.3% of eligible voters cast their ballots. But the opposition stood to gain from a strong anti-government mood. The ODS and the Communist KSČM emerged victorious with 30% and 20.3% of the vote respectively. The three-party governing coalition led by the ČSSD, which included the KDU-ČSL and the ULD, received just above 20% of the vote altogether (see Table 8).

Prime Minister Špidla rendered his resignation shortly after he narrowly survived a vote of confidence by his party. He was succeeded by Interior Minister Stanislav Gross, a former train technician and the ČSSD's charismatic Vice-Chairman. Gross struck a deal with the KDU-ČSL and the US-DEU to avoid an early parliamentary election. At 34 years of age, Gross is one of the youngest and most unknown leaders in the enlarged EU. The government holds a fragile majority of one vote in the lower chamber of the Parliament. The next election is scheduled for 2006

**Table 8: Results of European Parliament Elections 2004 in the Czech Republic**

Parties	%	Seats	EPP-ED	PES	ALDE	Greens/EFA	EUL/NGL	IND/DEM	UEN	NA
ODS	30	9	9							
KSČM	20.3	6					6			
SNK/ED	11	3	3							
KDU-ČSL	9.6	2	2							
ČSSD	8.8	2		2						
Nezávislí	8.2	2						1		1
Others	12.1	0								
Total	100	24	14	2	0	0	6	1	0	1

Source: The European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

In Hungary, where the campaigns were fierce, the turnout was just above 38%. As mentioned earlier, the parties fought over domestic issues such as the country's economic performance and fiscal reforms, rather than European affairs. The conservative opposition parties Fidesz-MPSZ and MDF picked up a total of 13 seats (out of 24), against eleven for the ruling Socialist—Liberal coalition. The remaining four parties did not clear the 5% threshold (See Table 9).

The strong performance of the nationalist Fidesz-MPSZ is unlikely to turn Hungary into a difficult Member State to accommodate for the time being. The two most pro-integration groupings—the Socialists and the Liberals—won over 40% of the popular vote between them. Moreover, the radically anti-EU Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) and the Communist Workers’ Party (Munkáspárt) were marginal parties with very limited appeal. Eventually, Hungary’s policy towards the EU will depend on the outcomes of the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty and the parliamentary election in 2006. Should Hungarians become increasingly cynical about the EU, the next government will be expected to take a tougher stance in the Council of Ministers and during the European summits.

**Table 9: Results of European Parliament Elections 2004 in Hungary**

Parties	%	Seats	EPP-ED	PES	ALDE	Greens/EFA	EUL/NGL	IND/DEM	UEN	NA
FIDESZ	47.4	12	12							
MSZP	34.3	9		9						
SZDSZ	7.7	2			2					
MDF	5.3	1	1							
Others	5.3	0								
Total	100	24	13	9	2	0	0	0	0	0

Source: The European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

In Slovenia, 28.3% of eligible voters turned out to vote. In a post-election opinion survey, 46% of respondents explained non-participation in terms of “disappointment with politics”, whilst for 22% of respondents, voters did not show up because “people did not understand what the election was about” and “the election seemed unimportant”<sup>35</sup>.

Slovenia’s opposition centre-right NSi came in first with nearly a quarter of the vote, but the combined list of the governing centre-left LDS and DeSUS coalition came in a close second; each party took two seats in the European Parliament. The centre-right SDS also won two seats, while the centre-left ZLSD picked up the last seat. Three other lists also managed to clear the 4% threshold, but they did not receive enough support to win seats under the d’Hondt system (See Table 10).

<sup>35</sup> Galiteo Politbarometer, June 2004. Available: [www.galiteo.si](http://www.galiteo.si).

**Table 10: Results of European Parliament Elections 2004 in Slovenia**

Parties	%	Seats	EPP-ED	PES	ALDE	Greens/EFA	EUL/NGL	IND/DEM	UEN	NA
NSi	23.6	2	2							
LDS	21.9	2			2					
SDS	17.7	2	2							
ZLSD	14.2	1		1						
Others	22.6	0								
Total	100	7	4	1	2	0	0	0	0	0

Source: The European Union

Available: <http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>

More than half of those who voted indicated their preference for individual candidates. Naturally, personal charisma was a key factor in the poll. For example, the winning NSi list was led by Lojze Peterle, a Christian Democrat who was the Prime Minister of the first democratically elected government in May 1990. Perhaps more pertinently, he was the only person from the new Member States to become a member of the Presidium of the European Convention. In 2003, he was awarded the title of “European Achiever of the Year” by *European Voice* in Brussels.

Borut Pahor, the Speaker of the Slovenian Parliament and President of the ZLSD, was elected to the European Parliament despite (or because of) being the last candidate on the ZLSD list. Clearly the ZLSD intended to boost its share of votes by capitalising on Pahor’s popularity and charisma—a successful strategy as it turned out. What was not expected to happen was that a majority of social democrats preferred to cast their ballots specifically for Pahor.

None of the parties elected to the European Parliament are anti-EU. But of course they reassured voters that their representatives would stand firm for Slovenian national interest in the face of many (unspecified) dangers ensuing from the politics of European integration. In the words of Lojze Peterle,

*MEPs do their best for their countries, but not as national teams but through their (Trans-European) political parties. ... I’m however quite aware ... that when we*

*agree on a definitive Slovene interest, every representative will follow that goal regardless of which grouping they belong to*<sup>36</sup>.

In general, the centre-right parties such as NSi display a stronger intergovernmentalist orientation towards the process of European integration than their centre-left rivals. But by and large, Slovenia is now represented in the European Parliament by parties which see Slovenia's participation in the EU as compatible with national interests.

Notwithstanding the disappointing turnout, political parties treated the results seriously as a dress rehearsal for the upcoming parliamentary election in October 2004. The Christian Democratic NSi and the conservative SDS, both centre-right parties in the opposition, were satisfied with the outcome. It goes without saying that the governing centre-left LDS--DeSUS coalition remains a formidable political force. In any case, the European Parliament election presaged a close race for the National Assembly election.

## **CONCLUSION: LESSONS FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

To sum up, the 2004 European Parliament elections were not "European" elections, but rather separate elections in each of the 25 Member States organised according to nationally determined electoral rules and behavioural patterns. From the start, the elections appeared to have suffered from a lack of focus and political significance in order to mobilise voters. The campaign was decentralised, mostly low-key affairs, in which a relatively small number of voters selected among national parties and leaders on the basis of national issues. The only visible "European" aspect of these elections was the fact that the winners were elected to a uniquely supranational European Parliament.

The struggle for recognition by the European Parliament has been a long and difficult one. It has gained power with the expansion of the co-decision procedure and become a significant institution at the heart of the European Union. The paradox is that the public has remained "rationally ignorant" and apathetic. Although the influence of the

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<sup>36</sup> The Slovenia Times, June 2004, p.4.

EU on the Member States and their citizens continues to grow, the level of participation in the European elections is unlikely to improve in ensuing elections.

In consequence, the relations between the European Parliament and EU citizens are tenuous. The legitimacy of the European Parliament is adversely affected by the falling turnout as well as poor understanding of the decision-making process at mass level. In Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the 2004 European Parliament elections witnessed a surge of antipathy towards the EU, whose impact can be felt in mainstream parties as much as fringe groupings. With the formal accession of the Central and East European countries into the EU on May 1, critics had become increasingly vocal. The rise of Eurosceptical rhetoric in the region during the elections reflected deep-seated ambivalence about the process of European integration in general and the policies of EU in particular. Anti-supranational sentiments were couched in terms of the preservation of national sovereignty, and its embodiment in national institutions. It remains to be seen if it is more likely that greater heterogeneity of interests along national lines would undermine the cohesion of the transnational parties within the EP, making pro-integration legislation more difficult.

Against this background, public attitudes towards “an ever closer union” are far from reassuring. More specifically, the electoral outcomes have shown how difficult it will be to gain citizens’ approval for the Constitutional Treaty in referendums in many of the new (and old) Member States. At the moment there is very little interest in the EU Constitutional Treaty. But the positive outcomes of the 2003 accession referendums, which were well-publicised and well-attended events, suggest how EU policy-makers may proceed with the proposed Constitutional Treaty. It may well be that pro-integration voters are more inclined to show up when it really matters.

At any rate, the pre-accession cross-party support for membership in most of the new Member States has already given way to a more dynamic, but at the same time less predictable, debate about the future of Europe. At the mass level too, pro-EU feelings can no longer be taken for granted. Different shades of opinion on a whole range of EU matters are expected to come to the fore. There may well be no alternative to the EU’s monopolistic domination in the continent, but the new Member States do not

appear to be happy with political integration in accordance with the supranational—federal ideal either.

In all, the “return to Europe” that had taken Central and East European nations 15 years is finally completed with their transformation from being compliant candidates with little bargaining power into full-fledged stakeholders and, if necessary, defiant veto-players in the EU. In an increasingly multi-national EU, unity, not diversity, should surprise us. It goes without saying that EU leaders must take both unity and diversity seriously.

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