



2009 European Parliament Elections: parties, polls and recent developments

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The European Parliament (EP) elections will be held in the UK on 4 June 2009, alongside local elections. This Note looks at the EC Treaty base for the elections, public views and voter turnout, and European political groups and parties. It complements SN 4952, “2009 European Parliament Elections”, 27 January 2009.

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1 Introduction

The seventh direct European Parliament elections since 1979 are to be held from 4 to 7 June 2009. The UK and the Netherlands will vote on Thursday 4 June, Latvia and Malta on Friday 6 June (Italy on 6-7 June), while most Member States will vote on Sunday 7 June. Over 700 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will be elected by proportional representation to represent around 515,000,000 European Union (EU) citizens.

Campaigning has not started in the UK or in the majority of Member States. However, in France the governing centre-right *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) launched its election campaign on 24 January, with President Nicolas Sarkozy calling on the party to work

to "make Europe move". Two ministers, Michel Barnier (agriculture) and Rachida Dati (justice), are reported to be leaving the government to run in the elections.¹

In July 2008 MEPs decided by 481 votes to 203 with 26 abstentions to adopt a report (by Richard Corbett (PES)) to amend their internal rules to raise the threshold for constituting an EP political group, but this will not apply to the 2009 elections. After these elections, the status of political group will require a minimum of 25 Members (3.3% of EP membership) representing at least 7 Member States (roughly a quarter of EU Member States). Currently, the requirement is 20 Members representing at least six Member States (2.5% of EP membership). The EP also approved an amendment allowing a political group to continue to exist if it falls below the required threshold under certain conditions.²

2 Treaty base

2.1 Lisbon or Nice?

It was envisaged in the *Treaty of Lisbon* that the Treaty would come into force in January 2009, in good time for European Parliament (EP) elections in June 2009 to be held under its new institutional provisions. Lisbon Protocol No. 36 on Transitional Provisions states in Article 2:

In accordance with the second subparagraph of Article 14(2) of the Treaty on European Union, the European Council shall adopt a decision determining the composition of the European Parliament in good time for the 2009 European Parliament elections.³

In view of the likely timetable for a second referendum in Ireland in autumn 2009, the Polish insistence on waiting for the Irish vote before signing off the Treaty, and delays in Germany, the Lisbon implementation target is now impossible. The June EP elections will therefore take place under the Nice Treaty provisions, with a different distribution of seats. Under Nice the total number of seats will be reduced to 736 in the 2009 election, with fewer seats for 12 Member States, including the UK. The UK will have 72 seats under Nice, but would have 73 under Lisbon.

The European Council has decided to apply Lisbon provisions after the EP elections (see Section 3 below).

2.2 Lisbon Treaty provisions

Article 14 of the consolidated *Treaty on European Union*⁴ is based on present Article 190 TEC and the Nice *Protocol on the Enlargement of the European Union*. It proposes an allocation of EP seats on the basis of 'degressive proportionality'.⁵ The total number of seats shall not exceed 750 (it is currently set at 732 under Article 189 TEC).⁶ The maximum number of seats for a Member State is capped at 96 and the minimum threshold is six. The

¹ Further information on the elections can be found on the European Parliament website at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2009/default.htm?language=en>

² EP press release, 9 July 2008 at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=EN&type=IM-PRESS&reference=20080708IPR33697>

³ OJC 115, 9 May 2008 p.322

⁴ OJC 115, 9 May 2008, p.22 at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:SOM:en:HTML>.

⁵ The principle of allocating to the smaller states a greater per-head representation than the large ones with a proportionate distribution of votes for countries in between.

⁶ The actual current number of EP seats is 785 including a temporary raised ceiling from the previous 736 to accommodate the membership of Bulgaria and Romania.

final composition is fixed by a unanimous decision of the European Council on a proposal from the EP (Article 14(2) TEU).

On 2 October 2007 the EP Constitutional Affairs Committee agreed a proposal on the distribution of seats,⁷ which was adopted on 11 October 2007 by the EP in plenary. This sets out the distribution of seats from the 2009 elections as follows:

Member State	Population (1) (in millions)	% of EU-27 Population	Seats until 2009	"Nice" (2) 2009-2014	Report in plenary (3) 2009 - 2014	Proposal rapp (4)
Germany	82,438	16,73%	99	99	96	-3
France	62,886	12,76%	78	72	74	2
United Kingdom	60,422	12,26%	78	72	73	1
Italy	58,752	11,92%	78	72	72	
Spain	43,758	8,88%	54	50	54	4
Poland	38,157	7,74%	54	50	51	1
Romania	21,61	4,38%	35	33	33	
Netherlands	16,334	3,31%	27	25	26	1
Greece	11,125	2,26%	24	22	22	
Portugal	10,57	2,14%	24	22	22	
Belgium	10,511	2,13%	24	22	22	
Czech Rep.	10,251	2,08%	24	22	22	
Hungary	10,077	2,04%	24	22	22	
Sweden	9,048	1,84%	19	18	20	2
Austria	8,266	1,68%	18	17	19	2
Bulgaria	7,719	1,57%	18	17	18	1
Denmark	5,428	1,10%	14	13	13	
Slovakia	5,389	1,09%	14	13	13	
Finland	5,256	1,07%	14	13	13	
Ireland	4,209	0,85%	13	12	12	
Lithuania	3,403	0,69%	13	12	12	
Latvia	2,295	0,47%	9	8	9	1
Slovenia	2,003	0,41%	7	7	8	1
Estonia	1,344	0,27%	6	6	6	
Cyprus	0,766	0,16%	6	6	6	
Luxembourg	0,46	0,09%	6	6	6	
Malta	0,404	0,08%	5	5	6	1
EU-27	492,881	100,00%	785	736	750	
(1) Population figures as officially established on 7 November 2006 by the Commission in Doc. 15124/06 on the basis of Eurostat figures.						
(2) "Nice": Distribution of Seats according to Art. 189 TEC as modified by Art. 9 of the BG/RO - Act of Accession.						
(3) "New": New Proposal on the basis of Art. 9A TEU new (I-20).						
(4) The new figures concerning Germany and Malta derive automatically from the draft reform treaty provisions. ⁸						

Following Italy's demand for an extra EP seat to bring it into line with the UK, the ceiling of 750 is now followed by "plus the President" (making it 751).⁹ A Declaration on the composition of the EP specifies that the additional EP seat "will be attributed to Italy", which

⁷ Co-rapporteurs Alain Lamassoure (EPP-ED, FR) and Adrian Severin (PES, RO), A6-0351/2007, approved in committee by 17 votes in favour, five against and three abstentions. See procedure file at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/file.jsp?id=5511632>

⁸ EP briefing 4 October 2007, "Distribution of EP seats: Constitutional Affairs Committee approves proposal" at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20070927BRI10862+ITEM-002-EN+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

⁹ DS 869/07, 19 October 2007 at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/ds00869.en07.pdf> and Article 14(2) TEU

will therefore have 73 rather than 72.¹⁰ This was agreed by the European Council in October 2007 and is appended to the Lisbon Treaty.

2.3 European Council decision on EP seats

The 2007 EP resolution is intended to enter into force if and when Lisbon is implemented, until which time the Nice provisions apply. However, the European Council which met on 11-12 December 2008 agreed transitional institutional provisions in the form of Declarations in Annex 1 of the Presidency Conclusions.

The Declaration on the EP provides that, if Lisbon has not been ratified by the time of the EP elections, it will elect 736 members. Following ratification, the 12 Member States due to gain extra seats will obtain them, while Germany will temporarily keep the three extra seats it would have lost had Lisbon been ratified before the elections. The Declaration states:

In the event that the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force after the European elections of June 2009, transitional measures will be adopted as soon as possible, in accordance with the necessary legal procedures, in order to increase, until the end of the 2009-2014 legislative period, in conformity with the numbers provided for in the framework of the IGC which approved the Treaty of Lisbon, the number of MEPs of the twelve Member States for which the number of MEPs was set to increase. Therefore, the total number of MEPs will rise from 736 to 754 until the end of the 2009-2014 legislative period. The objective is that this modification should enter into force, if possible, during the year 2010.¹¹

3 Voter turnout and public interest in EP elections

3.1 Voter turnout

For a parliament which has been described as “now one of the most powerful legislatures in the world both in terms of its legislative and executive oversight powers”,¹² there is a low level of public awareness of and interest in EP elections. Turnout has been low, not only in the UK, but across the EU, and has decreased with each five-year election cycle since the first direct elections in 1979. Turnout was 62% in 1979, falling to 49.51% in 1999 and 47.63% in 2004. In the UK turnout in 2004 was 38.4 %, measured as valid votes cast as a share of the electorate. This was the highest recorded in the UK at an EP election and compared with 24.0 percent in 1999. Turnout in 2004 increased in all regions compared to 1999.¹³ This was largely attributed to the holding of the EP election with English local elections - and this has been given as a reason to do the same in 2009.¹⁴ The following table shows average turnout across the EU since 1979:

¹⁰ Declaration No. 4, OJC115, 9 May 2008, p.337

¹¹ Declaration on Lisbon and the Composition of the EP, Presidency Conclusions, 11-12 December 2008. For full details of the European Council agreement, see SN/IA/4921, “The Lisbon Treaty: the European Council and prospects for Irish ratification”, 18 December 2008.

¹² Professor Farrell, Head of the School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, EP press release 18 June 2007 at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=EN&type=IM-PRESS&reference=20070615IPR07837>

¹³ See Research Paper 04/50, “European Parliament elections 2004”, 23 June 2004.

¹⁴ The Minister for Local Government, John Healey, said “As in 2004, holding the local elections alongside the European elections in 2009 could help boost voter turnout and improve the democratic process”, HC Deb 7 October 2008 c 8WS at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm081007/wmstext/81007m0001.htm#08100730000012>

Member States	1979	1984	1987	1989	1994	1995	1996	1999	2004
DE	65.7	56.8		62.3	60			45.2	43
FR	60.7	56.7		48.7	52.7			46.8	42.75
BE	91.4	92.2		90.7	90.7			91	90.81
IT	84.9	83.4		81.5	74.8			70.8	73.1
LU	88.9	88.8		87.4	88.5			87.3	90
NL	57.8	50.6		47.2	35.6			30	39.3
UK	32.2	32.6		36.2	36.4			24	38.9
IE	63.6	47.6		68.3	44			50.2	59.7
DK	47.8	52.4		46.2	52.9			50.5	47.9
EL		77.2		79.9	71.2			75.3	63.4
ES			68.9	54.6	59.1			63	45.1
PT			72.4	51.2	35.5			40	38.79
SE						41.6		38.8	37.8
AT							67.7	49.4	42.43
FI							60.3	31.4	41.1
CZ									28.3
EE									26.89
CY									71.19
LV									41.34
LT									48.38
HU									38.5
MT									82.37
PL									20.87
SI									28.3
SK									16.96
Average EU	63	61	/	58.5	56.8	/	/	49.8	45.6

¹⁵

When the new EU Members, Bulgaria and Romania, held EP elections in January 2007, voter turnout in both countries averaged 30%.

Elitsa Vucheva, writing in the *EUObserver*, looked at the paradoxical decline in public interest in the EP as the institution has gained in power and influence:

Despite its increasing importance on the European political scene, the parliament also has challenges to face when it comes to engaging European citizens in its affairs.

Voter disinterest and increasingly low turnouts at European elections in the light of the institution's increasing power is "a very dramatic and potentially dangerous development" and could influence the legislative process in the parliament for the years to come, argues Mr Missiroli.

"You have a sort of hybrid, strange animal that has ever increasing power and decreasing legitimacy, while the mechanisms for selecting the MEPs are still very different from country to country."

"There are MEPs with different degrees of legitimacy from one another as they are elected on the basis of different electoral systems and also enjoy different benefits once elected, but all have the same voting rights in the assembly," says the EPC analyst.

The difficulty to create a European public space, as well as the fact that "we still have 27 national elections" that most of the time turn into a "sort of opinion poll

¹⁵ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2004/ep-election/sites/en/results1306/turnout_ep/turnout_table.html

on current governments in which the protest vote tends to prevail," could partly explain the phenomenon.

'Competitive' election as a remedy?

According to Mr Missiroli, if nothing changes by next spring, "this is likely to get worse."

"The paradox of the next elections could be that the next parliament, which is set to have the strongest powers in the history of European integration, will also be the one that will be elected by a minority of citizens and by an above-the-average percentage of protest voters against Europe," he argues.

As one way to counter the tendency the analyst suggests making the electoral systems in Europe more homogenous.

Another possibility would be to introduce a so-called "competitive" election - an idea first floated by Jacques Delors in the 1990s, under which the main political parties would indicate who their candidate for commission president is before the elections, allowing citizens to elect a parliament and choose a commission president at the same time.

With both of these ideas unlikely to be realised by the June European elections, however, MEPs will have to think of other ways to bring their citizens to the polls.¹⁶

3.2 2008 Eurobarometer poll

A Eurobarometer poll in autumn 2008 revealed that the "vast majority of EU citizens remain unaware that European elections will take place [in 2009] despite a concerted effort by politicians in Brussels to raise the profile of the European Parliament".¹⁷ When asked whether they knew that EP elections were due to be held:

- 26% of respondents are aware that European elections will be held in 2009, compared with 7% who think that they will be held in another year and 67% who did not answer the question
- The number of respondents who know the year in which the next European elections will be held has therefore increased by 10 percentage points since the previous wave (16% in spring 2008).¹⁸

The survey noted that interest in the European elections had slightly decreased compared to the last wave (44%, -2 points). There was high interest in the EP elections in Ireland and the Netherlands (60% each). At the time of the survey 34% of respondents seemed determined that they would definitely vote, while 15% declared that would definitely not vote. 34% had a positive image of the European Parliament, 5 points lower than in autumn 2007. The majority of respondents had a neutral image of the Parliament (43%, +2 points).¹⁹

A report in *EurActiv* in October 2008 looked at possible reasons behind voter apathy:

¹⁶ *EUObserver* 12 November 2008, "MEPs have 'increasing power, decreasing legitimacy" at <http://euobserver.com/883/27064>

¹⁷ 19 January 2009 at <http://euobserver.com/9/27432/?rk=1>

¹⁸ Summary of results, December 2008 at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_303_presentation_en.pdf. Dates of fieldwork: 06/10/2008 – 06/11/2008. Total number of interviews: 26 618 (around 1000 per country). Population: representative sample of the population aged 15 or over resident in the country and EU citizens.

European elections: 'Second-order national elections'?

[...] Firstly, European elections are still fought mainly on national issues. Most academics – and more crucially, politicians themselves - actually consider them to be "second-order national elections" ([EurActiv 14/04/08](#)).

In effect, the vast majority of European voters remain unaware of the policy issues and fights that are taking place at the European level. As a result, the national level tends to step in as a substitute ([EurActiv 14/05/08](#)). There is, as yet, no real European political sphere to speak of.

To make matters worse, it appears that voters use European elections as a means to punish their governments mid-term, attesting to the weak politicisation of European integration in most EU countries.

Politicians therefore tend to base their campaigns on national issues and seek recognition for things that matter to their national parties and constituencies. This is also due to the way the elections are organised as the election lists are determined according to national or regional parties.

Sebastian Kurpas, a research fellow at the European Policy Centre in Brussels, recently told EurActiv: "You can be a very successful MEP who works very hard at European level but it might not in the end be determinant to having a top position on the list. In the end, it will be more important to be in good terms with the national parties that draw up the list" ([EurActiv 14/05/08](#)).

Moreover, European political parties are still dependent on their national affiliates if they want to exist, says Kurpas. "As a single individual, you could not join the European Socialist Party or the EPP - the only way to become a member is through your national party."

Reasons behind voter apathy: Voting will not change anything

Secondly, there is a widespread perception among voters that their voice will not make a big difference. Many do not feel an incentive to go to the polls because they do not see direct consequences in terms of power-sharing at EU level.

Indeed, with 785 MEPs, even Germany, the largest EU country with 99 seats in Parliament, only has a fairly limited amount of influence. Things are obviously worse for tiny countries such as Luxembourg (six MEPs) or Malta (five MEPs). With 78 MEPs, even a large country like France has long lamented its loss of influence in the EU and this is one of the factors explaining the country's reluctance towards further enlargement of the bloc.

Reviewing political affiliation instead of nationality should bring a better view of how power is divided in the European Parliament. With 288 MEPs, the centre-right EPP-ED Group proudly claims to be the most influential political group in Parliament.

But affiliation to a political group or party can be a misleading indicator as MEPs do not always follow the same line. The British Conservatives for example are notoriously more reluctant towards EU integration than their German counterparts, yet both are members of the same European Parliament group. As a result, the political programmes of European political groups and

¹⁹ Ibid

parties tend to be diluted in order to cater for the particular sensitivities of the different national party affiliates.

The result is a lack of a clear power struggle between parties who moreover lack clear-cut programmes and objectives. The fact that no major party officially backs a candidate for top European jobs such as the Commission President adds to the impression that European elections do not really matter that much.

Poor media coverage and lack of information

Consequently, lack of interest in European elections is rife among media professionals who find it difficult to "sell their story" to editors, particularly to the national media and television.

Cees Van der Eijk, a professor of social science at the University of Nottingham in the UK, argues that "the media pays very little attention to European elections. EU actors are generally invisible, and the elections are labelled boring even before they take place".

Moreover, he says "when the media constantly predicts low voter turnout, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy" ([EurActiv 14/04/08](#)).

In other words, a vicious circle of voter apathy has developed among EU citizens, fuelled by a lack of clear-cut power struggles which in turn diverts media interest away from the election. This apathy was most notoriously demonstrated when 11 million turned out to vote in the 1999 European elections in the UK, while 23 million voted on the popular "Big Brother" TV show a few years later.

A lack of basic information about the Parliament and the elections is also a concern. A recent Eurobarometer poll indicated that EU citizens largely consider the European Parliament to play an increasingly important role within the Union, but the majority also admit that they are not well-informed about its role and functions.

For example, 73% of the people interviewed admitted that they feel fairly or very badly informed about the Parliament's activities. And only 10% of those surveyed were actually aware that the next elections will take place in 2009.

Essentially, voters do not feel they understand what the Parliament does, let alone what it does for them, and they stay at home on Election Day as a result.²⁰

The report also identified "reasons to be positive" and outlined the measures EP political parties had taken to improve voter participation:

First, the lack of a well-defined European political sphere has not prevented the Parliament from developing a stable and largely representative political assembly.

At elections, voters still tend to choose on the basis of national contexts, but because European Parliament political groups have a socialisation effect, they bring cohesion to their members after the election. According to Van der Eijk, European parties are still surprisingly coherent in policy terms, roughly

²⁰ *EurActiv* European Elections: Outlook for 2009, updated 22 October 2008 at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/european-elections-outlook-2009/article-174694>

coinciding with the left-right political continuum of most EU countries. Despite the lack of politicisation of European issues, this would tend to show that voters' broad political preferences are still represented – albeit indirectly, he says ([Euractiv 14/04/08](#)).

Secondly, although voter turnout is low compared to national elections, it is still higher than, for example, mid-term elections in the USA. Former European Parliament President Pat Cox once famously pointed out that the 1999 European election turnout was higher than the previous US Presidential election.²¹

4 European political groups and parties

4.1 European People's Party – European Democrats (EPP-ED)

The EPP and the ED hold 288 out of the current 785 EP seats. The group will adopt a manifesto at its party congress in Warsaw on 29-30 April 2009. *EurActiv* commented on divisions within the EPP which may threaten its dominant position in the EP:

The centre-right **European People's Party (EPP)** will unveil its election programme at the party's Warsaw Congress in April 2009. According to its spokesperson, the EPP campaign will "seek to bridge the gap between the EU institutions and public opinion by focusing on the real issues and problems faced by the citizens such as climate change, demographic change, ensuring a more prosperous and safer Europe for everyone, and Europe's role in the world."

The EPP has experienced difficulties in finding a consensus among its 72 member parties on divisive issues such as Turkey's EU accession or the reform of the EU budget. However, its political group in the European Parliament, the EPP-ED, has managed to put together a broadly-worded political strategy divided under four headings: 1) Creating a Europe of values; 2) A Europe of growth and prosperity; 3) Making Europe a safer place, and; 4) Achieving greater solidarity in Europe.

After the last European elections in 2004, the EPP faced a number of criticisms, with some accusing the party of incorporating extra national party affiliates only to win more parliamentary seats, at the expense of political coherence. Max Kohnstamm, the honorary president of the European Policy Centre (EPC), a Brussels think-tank, criticised the composition of the Parliament group, the EPP-ED, noting that it consists of both elected officials striving for an integrated, "quasi-federal Europe" and sceptics who want a looser kind of integration.

"What binds them are not political objectives but numbers," Kohnstamm said. "To call such a group the parliamentary representation of a political party is no more than a game of words and a simple misleading of voters."

Whether the EPP will be able to translate its political strategy into a coherent common campaign for the 2009 election therefore remains to be seen. And it is not certain either that such a programme will appeal to its core voters, especially in countries with a traditionally more critical stance towards Europe.

In response, EPP Press Officer Javier Jimenez noted that "like other political parties, the EPP will be confronted with low participation in the European

²¹ <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/european-elections-outlook-2009/article-174694>

elections. It is therefore the EPP's intention to stimulate the debate on European policies involving citizens, institutions and civil society.²²

The EPP Secretary-General, Antonio Lopez-Isturiz, believes the party will retain its majority in the EP "as Europeans pick a safe pair of hands in the economic crisis over socialist 'agit-prop'"²³. He did not think the current economic crisis would damage the centre-right, market economy-oriented parties.

It is not yet clear whether the UK Conservatives' association with the EPP-ED will be maintained after the 2009 elections. The Conservatives helped establish the European Democratic (ED) group in 1979. However, many left to join the EPP, leaving the ED weakened. The UK Conservatives joined the EPP group as individual members under Article 6 of the EPP Statute in 1992, but remained independent of the EPP pan-European party, which became the EPP-ED in 1999.

The Conservative leader David Cameron pledged in 2005 to withdraw the party completely from the EPP-ED after the 2009 EP elections. Conservative MEPs have signed a pledge to abide by Mr Cameron's final decision, which he will make known after the June vote. If he decides to form a new group, possible partners in a new coalition of centre-right parties have been suggested, including the Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek's Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Poland's Law and Justice Party (PIS) and France's Rally for France party (RPF).²⁴ Becoming unattached members ("non-inscrits") might be another option, although this could, according to Charles Tannock, lead to a "position of marginal impact, reduced influence and unworthy isolation".²⁵ More recently, the option of the ED forming a confederation with the Union for Europe of the Nations Group (UEN) has been mooted.

Some reports suggest that most Conservative MEPs do not want to leave the EPP-ED group, in spite of signing the Cameron pledge, for fear that their influence and power in the European Parliament would be reduced.²⁶

4.2 Party of European Socialists (PES)

The PES currently holds 215 out of 783 EP seats and is the second-largest group in the EP after the EPP. *EurActiv* commented on the PES strategy for the 2009 elections:

In the socialist camp, low turnout is the biggest concern, with widespread disenchantment about Europe a cause of voter apathy which socialists fear could make them lose influence in the European Parliament. "Traditionally, we feel it is our own voters who stay away," said Julian Scola, a communications and campaign advisor at the **Party of European Socialists (PES)**. Speaking to *EurActiv*, he said this was because socialist voters often consider the EU to be "too technocratic" and therefore not relevant enough as a political decision-making entity ([EurActiv 24/04/08](#)).

To re-engage with its voters, the PES has therefore chosen to polarise the debate along traditional left-right political fault lines. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the president of the PES, recently declared: "We want a manifesto that offers

²² 22 October 2008 at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/european-elections-outlook-2009/article-174694>

²³ *EUObserver* 23 January 2009 at <http://euobserver.com/883/27457>

²⁴ Charles Tannock MEP, 2 December 2008 at <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/12/conservative-me.html>

²⁵ 19 November 2008 at <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/11/why-unattached.html>

²⁶ See interview with Timothy Kirkhope, leader of the UK Conservative delegation to the EP, *EurActiv* 12 January 2009 at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/mep-cameron-decide-stay-epp/article-178426>

not only a clear choice between left and right, [but one] that has also been shaped through consultation and debate. We want to show that social democrats have different politics from the conservatives, and that we do politics in a different way too."

The PES has invested heavily in online tools to engage with young voters and has been running a Europe-wide internet consultation on its manifesto for the 2009 elections. But it remains to be seen whether the party will come up with a meaningful programme that will bring its traditional voters back to the ballot boxes.²⁷

The PES published its manifesto, "People first: A new direction for Europe" on 1 December 2008. Its sixty-plus proposals were summarised in a PES press release²⁸:

- A European strategy for smart green growth to create 10 million new jobs by 2020
- New financial market regulation covering all players including hedge funds and private equity
- Climate-changing emission reductions for industries such as transport and construction
- A European Pact on Wages for decent minimum wages in all EU member states
- Stepping up the fight against the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation.
- The proposals are featured under six priority areas for reform:

Relaunching the economy and preventing new financial crises

Giving people a fairer deal in a new Social Europe

Transforming Europe into the leading global force against climate change

Championing gender equality in Europe

Developing an effective migration policy for Europe

Enhancing Europe's role as a partner for peace, security and development²⁸

According to media reports, the PES is hoping the financial crisis will result in voters turning to socialist democrat policies on market reform and an economy based on "smart green growth". The PES President, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, is to tour EU capitals to launch the manifesto and, starting on 7-8 March 2009, the party is planning 'European days of action' across the EU to campaign on specific issues (e.g. gender equality, climate change and the economy). The party's aim of overtaking the EPP is ambitious. Only eight out of the EU's 27 governments are led by the left or centre-left, with another three are junior coalition partners.

Comparisons have been made with the Obama campaign in the US:

²⁷ 22 October 2008

²⁸ <http://www.pes.org/content/view/1457/72>. The full text is at http://www.pes.org/downloads/PES_manifesto_2009-EN.pdf

Echoing the US Democratic campaign, in which the now president-elect Barack Obama used "change" as his key message, the European Socialists also want to portray themselves as "a force for change," and denounce the conservative leadership that has dominated EU institutions and national governments over the past five years.²⁹

4.3 Alliance of Liberal Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

The Alliance of Liberal Democrats for Europe (ALDE) is a transnational political alliance founded in 2004, comprising the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) and the European Democratic Party (EDP). It is the third-largest political group in the EP.

The ELDR, which is led by the Belgian Flemish MEP, Annemie Neyts, launched its twelve-point manifesto "for a more liberal Europe", on 30-31 October 2008 at its two-day congress in Stockholm. The four main policy areas are

- civil liberties
- EU single market, growth and employment
- environment and energy policy
- enlargement, foreign, security and defence policy.³⁰

4.4 European Green Party (EPG)/European Free Alliance (EFA)

The EPG-EFA, established as an EP group in 1999, is formed by the Greens and the European Free Alliance of "representatives of stateless nations ("regionalists)".³¹ The EFA includes MEPs from Scotland, Wales, the Basque Country, Romania and Latvia.

The Green Party is the first of the existing EP parties to run a pan-European campaign for the 2009 elections. In January 2009 the EPG published its manifesto, "A Green New Deal for Europe",³² which "sets out a new direction for Europe. As economic, social and environmental crises converge, it is time to shift our course from destructive short-term profiteering towards sustainable, long-term prosperity".³³ The campaign and manifesto are to be launched at the EGP Congress on 27.March.2009. *EurActiv* noted:

Among European parties, the **European Green Party (EGP)** has gone the furthest down this pan-European road. During the 2004 election, the Greens were the first political family to hold a common campaign based on written materials and posters, said Philippe Lamberts, co-spokesperson of the EGP in an interview with *EurActiv* (*EurActiv* [25/01/08](http://euobserver.com/25/01/08)).

For the 2009 campaign, the EGP plans to do even more, with a "common campaign" and events planned in several European capitals such as Rome and Prague. "You will really feel that the Greens are acting together rather than just speaking together," said Lamberts.

²⁹ *EUObserver* 1 December 2008 at <http://euobserver.com/883/27202>

³⁰ The full text of the manifesto is available at http://www.eldr.org/images/upload/adopted_manifesto_english.pdf

³¹ <http://www.greens-efa.org/cms/default/rubrik/6/6646.presentation@en.htm>

³² There is a useful summary at <http://europeangreens.eu/menu/egp-manifesto/> and a campaign blog at http://europeangreens.eu/menu/blog/blog-single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=3&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=17&cHash=df861cd461.

³³ *Ibid*

However, he also admitted that there was some way to go before the Greens could show a truly united front, as some national affiliates such as Britain and Sweden may have stronger anti-European stances. "In some countries, the common campaign will be 99% of the campaign because they do not want to add a national touch to it, whereas in other countries the common campaign might only make up 15%."³⁴

4.5 Independence/Democracy

The 'eurosceptics' are currently represented in the EP in a small group called Independence/Democracy, which was set up on 20 July 2004 and is led by The Group's leaders are Nigel Farage (UKIP) and Kathy Sinnott (Independent, Ireland). The Ind/Dem group has 22 MEPs from nine Member States. Its programme states:

The main goals of the Group are to reject the Treaty establishing a constitution for Europe and to oppose all forms of centralisation. Some members within the group, notably the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), advocate the complete withdrawal of their country from the EU.

Among the aims of the Group there is also the promotion of democracy. In fact, being the only Group in the European Parliament that opposes the European constitution, IND/DEM is giving voice to millions of people that wouldn't be otherwise represented.

Transparency is another important point of the Group's agenda.³⁵

4.6 European United Left (GUE)/Nordic Green Left Group (NGL)

This group, headed by the French MEP, Francis Wurtz, is made up of 41 MEPs from 17 political parties in 13 EU Member States. It is formed by the European United Left subgroup (parties in the Party of the European Left and other unaffiliated leftist parties) and the Nordic Green Left subgroup consisting of MEPs from the Nordic Green Left Alliance parties of Sweden and Finland.

The group is "firmly committed to European integration, although in a different form from the existing model" and emphasises the need for the EU to tackle "large-scale and increasing unemployment; ensuring respect for the environment; creating a common social area that provides equal rights at the highest level for all citizens; and, meeting the needs of those who are forced by poverty in their countries of origin (for which Europe bears a heavy responsibility) to seek their livelihood in the Union".³⁶

The European Left is an association of democratic socialist and communist parties.³⁷ It was formed in 2004 and ran in the EP elections that year. The party's electoral conference in Berlin on 29-30 November 2008 adopted the 2009 election manifesto.³⁸ The European Left Party Network in the UK has called for a unified left list for the 2009 elections.³⁹

³⁴ *EurActiv* 22 October 2008 at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/european-elections-outlook-2009/article-174694>

³⁵ <http://indemgroup.eu/16/>

³⁶ GUE/NGL *Constituent Declaration* 14 July 1994 at <http://www.guengl.eu/showPage.jsp?ID=639>

³⁷ Website at <http://eurleft.wordpress.com/about/>

³⁸ <http://eurleft.wordpress.com/manifesto-of-the-party-of-the-european-left/>

³⁹ 16 December 2008 at <http://eurleft.wordpress.com/>

4.7 Union for Europe of the Nations

The centre-right, non-federalist Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) was established on 20 July 1999 and joined the Alliance for Europe of the Nations (AEN), which was formed in June 2002.⁴⁰ The Alliance has conservative-nationalist and eurosceptic policies.

4.8 Non-attached

Thirty MEPs are not attached to any EP political group. They include UK members of the UK Independence Party and the Conservative and Unionist Party.

5 Aspirant pan-European parties

Since the last EP elections in 2004 more pan-European groups, organisations and movements have announced their intention to run campaigns in the 2009 elections as new parties independent of existing groups and parties. Examples are considered below.

5.1 Libertas

Declan Ganley, the businessman who coordinated the successful no-campaign in Ireland for the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, has been seeking to set up branches of his *Libertas* party in a number of other EU States, particularly in the newer Eastern European states. In December 2008 it was reported that *Libertas* was also running a British campaign⁴¹

An ALDE press release claimed the *Libertas* campaign would actually help their cause:

Liberals and Democrats in the European Parliament actually believe it will serve to get the issues out in the open, expose the deceit and untruths of the *Libertas* campaign and encourage pro-Europeans across the continent to be more vocal in support of the European Union.⁴²

The ALDE leader, Graham Watson, welcomed the challenge, which he thought would stimulate “interest and debate about the EU which may result in a higher turnout” at the 2009 elections.⁴³ The German ALDE MEP, Alexander Alvaro, did not think eurosceptics would gain from a more assertive campaign:

On the right-wing side, you will find nationalistic views of the sort 'my country first' and doubting that Europe can tackle problems. The left wing side will also try to use the financial crisis to say that the whole model that Europe has built, doesn't work - so go and vote for us.

On both sides and extremes, left and right will try to gain and win. They might try to use the crisis or the Lisbon Treaty. The left might say that Europe should be part of a peace-keeping mission. The right will say that Europe is trying to destroy our national identity. But I do not believe that they will gain from this tactic, just because in times of crisis, people do not want to try new experiments. We have experienced that people try to rely on what they have and what they know.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See *EUObserver* 25 June 2002 at <http://euobserver.com/9/6786>

⁴¹ <http://euobserver.com/9/27432/?rk=1>

⁴² ALDE, 11 December 2008 at <http://www.alde.eu/en/details/news/libertas-anti-european-party-will-galvanise-pro-europeans-to-defend-the-eu/>

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ Interview with Alexander Alvaro, *EurActiv* 27 January 2009 at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/mep-eurosceptics-gain-ground-eu-elections/article-178875>

A report in the *Daily Telegraph* focused on the results of a survey by *YouGov* for the *TaxPayersAlliance* and *Global Vision* on voting intentions in the UK electorate:

Ten per cent of those who would vote Tory in a general election will back UKIP in the euro-election, the survey suggests.

David Cameron has been trying to "close down" Europe as a political issue amid fears that traditional Tory divisions on the subject could resurface with the possible return of Ken Clarke, the strongly pro-Brussels former Chancellor, to the shadow cabinet.

Overall, 16 per cent of voters want Britain simply to withdraw from the EU, while 48 per cent would like to see a much looser relationship, with the government taking back powers from Brussels and ending the supremacy of the European Court of Justice over British law.⁴⁵

5.2 Europe United

Europe United was founded in 2005 by Aki Paasovaara and is headed by Mikael Latreille.⁴⁶ It wants institutional reform and a "stronger and more accountable" EU.

Europe United believes the EU is the best forum to deal with the challenges of globalisation. Europe United is in favour of greater European integration, but at the same time Europe United remains critical of the way the way the European Union currently works and believes that democratic reform of the EU is necessary.⁴⁷

Its political agenda for the EU is based on "Five demands", one of which concerns EU political parties:

The current framework in which national parties run campaigns for European elections based on national agendas defies the whole idea of European election and a European Parliament. Groups like the Party of European Socialists or the European People's Party do not have a common political platform or consciousness. Candidates in European elections should debate EU issues, such as reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, illegal immigration, climate change or security of energy supplies. Instead they are consumed, in most cases, by contests that become referenda to measure national government popularity. This results in low understanding of the purpose of European elections and the European Parliament, and, of course, in the indifference of the electorate and in low participation rates. Establishing common European parties (rather than umbrella organisation like the current groupings in the European Parliament) which will run common campaigns across the EU and debate EU issues in a direct and informative way, will help increase the political value of European elections.⁴⁸

Asked about his intentions for the 2009 elections, M. Latreille has said:

Europe United will present candidates in a certain number of Member States. We try to put into practice what we defend by introducing common candidates

⁴⁵ 11 January 2009 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/4214369/Loosen-Britains-ties-with-European-Union-say-two-thirds-of-voters..html>

⁴⁶ See interview at <http://www.taurillon.org/Europe-United-we-need-truly-pan-European-political-parties>

⁴⁷ <http://europeunited.eu/modules/start/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.fivedemands.eu/en/index.html>

in several Member States, making campaign on a common platform and on subjects with a European dimension. Our aim is to defend the need for real pan-European parties and we seek to show that we are right in practice. In other regions of Europe, where parties do not present any candidate, Europe United will implement its European campaign for the promotion of a general awareness on the European questions, that we call in a non-official way, the “do you know Europe” campaign.⁴⁹

5.3 Newropeans

Newropeans was founded by Franck Biancheri in June 2005 after the negative referendums on the proposed EU Constitution (for which it ran the “Yes-But” campaign)⁵⁰ and is currently represented in 12 of the 27 EU Member States. The group aims:

to help turn the EU from a bureaucratic top-down project into a democratically managed political entity. Today, we are facing a profound political crisis and a lack of political leadership in the EU which risks undermining the success of integration.⁵¹

5.4 Europe Democracy Esperanto

This is a French initiative with support in several European countries. One of its main objectives is Europe-wide learning of Esperanto.⁵²

⁴⁹ <http://www.taurillon.org/Europe-United-we-need-truly-pan-European-political-parties>

⁵⁰ <http://www.yesbut.org/en/>

⁵¹ <http://www.newropeans.eu/spip.php?rubrique=4&lang=en>

⁵² <http://e-d-e.org/?lang=en>