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Special Issue “European Parliament Elections”

Dear readers,

it is our great pleasure to present you another special edition of the Newsletter, which this time focuses on the European Parliament elections. The Czech political scene does not enter the elections in a position of a newbie, but with a five year experience it has acquired during its presence in the European Union. The following lines are concerned with the pre-election arena, parties' priorities and voters' anticipated behaviour.

We believe that the Newsletter will complement your overview of the current situation. You can find more information on other European issues and notably the Czech Presidency of the EU at our website www.predsednictvi.cz.

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Vít Dostál



**Zastoupení
Evropské komise
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Situation before the Elections

Michal Vít

Political parties' campaigns are going at full throttle, but pre-election atmosphere has been present since the beginning of the year. After the abysmal difference in election preferences between

ČSSD and ODS the chances of both parties have been equalising, albeit the Social democrats lead in most of the pre-election polls. According to the most recently published poll ČSSD is 6% ahead of ODS. Therefore the preferences of the strongest opposition party have not been significantly hurt by the fall of the government in the midst of the Presidency, initiated by the ČSSD, which can be attributed to the lukewarm approach of social democrats' voters to the EU.

The Greens and Social democrats are in the shade of attention drawn to the two biggest parties. The Greens are also in a situation when three "Green" subjects run for the EP and thus the environmentally oriented electorate will be somewhat atomised. The Christian democrats are taking big risks with their convention scheduled just a week ahead of the elections. If the situation inside the party remains conflictful during the convention, then the elections could turn into a flop for them. On the other hand this could be a specific way of attracting the attention of the media and the voters. It is very likely that the Communists will get in the EP – they just need to mobilise their quite disciplined and stable electorate.

The preferences do not show that non-parliamentary parties should get in the EP, even though they often and meticulously profile on European topics.

However it is already clear that the EP elections will be in the name of conflicts between the two strongest parties and the result will probably not be an abysmal loss of ODS against ČSSD. Thus the EP elections will probably become an "election intermezzo" in the permanent pre-election campaign.

The Paradox of EP Election Turnout

Václav Bacovský

The EP election turnout – the only directly elected EU institution has been declining constantly. However it varies significantly in different member states: countries with compulsory voting (Luxembourg, Belgium, Greece, Cyprus) logically have the highest rates of election turnout – around 70 to 90%, around 40 to 50% in Western European countries while the lowest election participation is in the countries of the former Soviet bloc (26% at average, while the lowest is 16% in Slovakia).

Irrespective of the broad variability of the election turnout one fact remains visible: across all the countries EP election turnout is at average by 20% lower than national parliament election turnout, which confirms the premise of the so-called second rate elections (this includes communal and regional elections as well as high representatives' election in some countries), where not that much is at stake. Paradoxically the competences of the EP are strengthened during the integration process while election turnout is diminishing. At the moment the EP directly or indirectly affects as much as 80% of legislature, but it does not interest voters much.

So where lays the main paradox of inadequate election turnout? Even though detailed scientific studies focusing on e.g. media coverage of European topics, euroscepticism or economic factors exist, it is an undisputable fact that an ordinary citizen does not know the role and competences of the EP in the decision process, the way fractions and coalitions are created and often does not even know the number and names of their own representatives. Despite the strengthening of

competences and the recent changes in voting patterns (see [S. Hix's paper](#)), the way EP functions is still too estranged from the functioning of the national parliaments. Simply put, the EP is a great unknown and therefore the lack of interest of citizens is not surprising. Modern campaigns making use of social networks such as Facebook, probably will not change much.

In the Czech case, election turnout will paradoxically be increased thanks to the dominance of national topics (the current campaign is in fact a vanguard of the October elections campaign). However it remains a question whether we should be happy about increased turnout if voters "make decisions" about topics that the EP cannot solve.

ČSSD and ODS EP Election Campaign: European Campaign without Strong European Topics

Alena Falathová

In spite of the Czech presidency of the EU, the conventional trend that European elections are mostly about national topics is also true this year. The strongest Czech political parties, ODS and ČSSD, placed their bets on this card and chose the economic crisis and critique of their main political rival as the fundamental topics of their campaigns. Thus the situation from regional election in 2008, when great polarisation was achieved through negative campaign, gets repeated.

ČSSD bases its campaign on promising certitude and securing social peace at the time of an economic crisis, which is "threatened by the Czech and Brussels right wing". Even though it refers to the common programme created by the Party of European Socialists, which it has incorporated into its election manifesto, it does not put much emphasis on its contents in its own campaign. It chooses health care, social care and education as its main topics; however the EU does not have any "hard" competences in these fields. It also implements the question of the placement of American radar in the Czech Republic into its election manifesto, which also cannot be answered at European level. ČSSD says that the Czech Republic "should not only be heard in the EU, but that it should also take part in positive formation of the EU." However this idea contradicts with the overthrowing of the government during the relatively well started presidency, because this step has weakened the possibility of the Czech government to form EU policies.

ODS also builds the main axis of its campaign on defining itself from its main opponent – ČSSD. In spite of that ODS' campaign shows a stronger European character, which is determined mainly by its role during the Czech presidency of the EU. It refers to the steps it has taken as the main governmental party of the presiding country in connection with solving the economic crisis. Its election manifesto is also more concerned with European topics. It comes with a clear vision of further continuation of the European integration process – it wishes to "take the road of flexible, economically open and further broadening entity, which will lead to the conception of a "flexible" or "variable" integration." With the current settings of the integration process, this conception would mean a multiple speed EU, in which the Czech Republic would not be in the fastest group. The Czech Republic would thus minimise its potential to push through its national interests.

The campaigns of both main political parties thus show common features. ODS as well as ČSSD do not build the main axis of their campaigns around European topics. They address European

topics more in their election manifestos, but both parties have the tendency to label as European topics such political areas which are primarily in the competence of national states.

Political Manifestos in the Sphere of European Anti-crisis Precautions

Tomáš Bůry

Guidelines on how to cope with the current unfavourable economic situation were included in the majority of election manifestos of the main Czech political parties which were prepared for the upcoming elections to the European Parliament. Economic policies can be found on the front pages of the election documents.

The most comprehensive discussion of the possible solutions to the current crisis is portrayed in the programme of CSSD which highlights the importance of a common currency that reinforces economic stability of the individual member states. CSSD furthermore calls for the need of regulated capital markets as well as adoption of measures which would prevent damaging practices of tax havens. The proposed precautions should improve overall social standards as well as living conditions in the EU which should further be enhanced by knowledge economy focusing on energetic efficiency and qualified workforce.

ODS focuses on the supply side of the market. The party stresses the need to focus on improvement of conditions for enterprises and acquisition of further sales opportunities in international markets with the aim to preserve job positions. According to the party, the EU should attempt to find further methods of world trade deregulation as well as aspire to re-invent its own agricultural subsidy policies. Lower taxes and lower social insurance should help boost economic growth. With regard to the specific requirements of individual member states ODS does not perceive a unified European social system as very viable.

Other parties as well deal with similar problematic issues. In line with its ideology the Greens reject social and ecological dumping backed by Asian countries and support protection of the European market against states which fail to adopt minimal environmental and working standards. On the other hand, in agreement with the biggest European political fraction, the European People's Party, KDU-CSL emphasizes intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion while reinforcing market mechanisms of the crisis resolution.

Despite the different approaches of the individual European guides to crisis resolution, it has to be noted that the dominant element of all of the Czech political manifestos are specific precautions regarding the national economy.

Representation of Women on the European Parliament Slate

Jana Smiggels Kavková, o.s. Fórum 50%

With the upcoming elections to the European Parliament it is interesting to have a look at the representation of women on the slates.

At the present, five women in total (i.e. 21%) are among the 24 Czech MEPs. In comparison to the majority of other states this number is marginal with only Malta, Cyprus, Italy and Poland having an

even smaller representation than that. With regard to the slates it can be assumed that the situation is not going to change significantly after the elections.

Only about five women politicians have a chance of being elected. Zuzana Roithova, being on the top of the KDU-CSL slate, will be elected almost certainly. Even the chances of Jana Hybaskova who is No.1 on the slate of her newly established European Democratic Party are relatively high. The third candidate Vera Flasarova from KSCM is also once again running for the post as the fifth candidate on the KSCM slate. In total three current female MEPs thus have a chance of being re-elected and to assume parliamentary seats in the next electoral period. The last female candidate who could join the latter three is Zuzana Brzobohata, who is the fifth candidate on the CSSD slate.

Katerina Konecna (6th position on the KSCM slate), Katerina Jacques (2nd position on the Green Party slate) or Olga Sehnalova (7th position on the CSSD slate) are other potential successful female candidates.

The leading position of two female politicians (Jana Hybaskova from EDS and Zuzana Rotihova from KDU-CSL) as well as the zip slate of the Green Party can definitely be seen as a positive sign. On the contrary, the situation in ODS is quite regretful. The highest ranking female candidate assumed only the 9th position on the slate and therefore it is not very likely that this party will have a female representative in the European Parliament.

The total number of female MEPs is not expected to increase and their relative representation could rise by no more than 2% due to the lower number of Czech MEPs overall.

Women politicians on the selected European Parliament slates

Political Party	Number of women in the top 5 (ranking)	Number of women in the top 10 (ranking)
ODS	0	1 (9.)
KDU-ČSL	2 (1.,4.)	2 (1.,4.)
EDS	3 (1.,3.,5.)	4 (1.,3.,5.,8.)
SZ	2 (2.,4.)	5 (2.,4.,6.,8.)
ČSSD	1 (5.)	2 (5.,7.)
KSČM	1 (5.)	3 (5.,6.,7.)

Comments on recent events

On the Way to the New 'European Conservatives'?

The British Conservative Party is on its way to victory in the European Parliamentary elections. However, its political manifesto irritates the vast majority of the continent. David Cameron, the Tory leader, has namely been demanding further EU enlargement as well as a British referendum on the Lisbon treaty with the obvious intention to impair it. On 10th May this pre-election activity

induced Angela Merkel to indirect criticism of Mr Cameron's actions. The programme of the Conservatives is in opposition to the main goals of Ms Merkel's CDU and Mr Sarkozy's UMP which are the two main parties of EPP-ED, a grouping in which also the British are involved. This is one of the reasons why Mr Cameron plans to leave EPP-ED after the European elections and establish a new political fraction. Dissent in EPP-ED is thus a logical outcome of the prolonged inner political disagreement. Even the Czech party ODS plays a small part in this dramatic situation; that is as one of the most loyal partners of the British. Over the last couple of months, however, ODS has started to abandon its initial radical euro-sceptic standpoint.

Libertas: on the Wave of Euroscepticism

On 13th May the leader of the new European eurosceptic party Libertas, Declan Ganley, visited president Vaclav Klaus at Prague Castle. Libertas was founded only a couple of months ago as a result of the Irish No vote to the Lisbon treaty. Nonetheless, European media were generous enough to award the party with wide publicity. Libertas aspiring to succeed in the European Parliamentary elections is viewed, at least from the Czech perspective, as a group of political adventurers, rather than a real threat for the already established parties.

Pre-election Manifesto of the European Socialists

The Party of European Socialists, the main rival of the biggest fraction in the European Parliament EPP-ED, published another manifesto in response to the programme aims of the competing party. Regardless of how good or bad the manifesto is, most probably it is not going to help the European Socialists beat EPP-ED. The pre-election surveys namely once again favour the victorious fraction from the 2004 elections.

Interviews for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ

Do you think that any European topic is becoming predominant in the current election campaign? There was a certain hope, that in connection with the presidency of the EU, something "European" would appear during the elections.

I think that overall the elections will end up like if they were Czech Parliament elections and national topics will prevail. They will certainly settle the squabbles concerning the fall of the government during the Presidency. Secondly, I think that the question of Euro acceptance and the position of the Czech Republic in the EU connected with the fading of the debates about the Lisbon Treaty, will emerge. But I doubt any new important European topics will emerge.

Pavel Šaradín, Political scientist at Palacký University in Olomouc, 14 May 2009.

Will smaller parties that profile in European topics and participate in the EP elections lose by the polarisation of the election atmosphere and early elections?

I would be very surprised if subjects that are marginal in national politics succeeded. These will be mobilisation and referendum elections and voters will not want to risk excessively. Thus they will rather incline to parliamentary parties. Right-wing voters will not vote for Libertas or Petr Mach's

Free Citizens' Party, but ODS. Building a single-issue party in the Czech Republic is a very hard task as shows in both the case of eurosceptics and eurooptimists. For example Ms. Hybášková is unfortunate that opinion on European integration fares at about the 13th preferential place by the Czech electorate. If her political party wanted to succeed, then it would have to encompass more issues and put more emphasis on other questions. A mere endorsement of the European integration is not enough.

Petr Kaniok, Political scientist at Masaryk University in Brno, 15 May 2009.

Complete interviews can be found on www.predsednictvi.cz.

Interesting Publications

London School of Economics & Trinity College Dublin

Leading political scientists focusing on the European integration – Simon Hix, Michael Marsh and Nick Vivyan published interesting results of their research in an appealing form. The research predicts the results of the European Parliament elections. According to the authors' predictions the European People's Party should remain the largest fraction in the European Parliament, whilst the Socialist group is expected to acquire more seats than previously in 2004.

European Commission

The last published survey of the Eurobarometer on the European Parliament elections indicates that the voters desire further empowerment of the EP. In addition, they consider the matter of growing unemployment and problems caused by the economic crisis as the main issues that should be discussed in the EP.

VoteWatch.eu

A website devoted to matters concerning the European Parliament and the EP ballots was recently set up. The website among others offers results and long-term characteristic of individual votes as well as votes of fractions. By offering an immense amount of versions and topics this web portal provides great service not only to researches but also outsiders interested in the European Parliament. These aspirations furthermore significantly contribute to transparency and understanding of decision-making by the European Parliament.

It Was Said in the European Union

"Today only very few decisions in the EU are made without the statement of MEPs. The EP gradually becomes the axis of political compromise at European level."

President of the EP Hans-Gert Pöttering during his concluding speech at the last session of the EP, cadence 2004 – 2009, 6 May [More](#)

“Those who will vote for Libertas will thus say “no” to Lisbon. It will be a clear signal that Brussels or any Prime Minister will not be able to ignore easily. However it will not be a message against the European Union, but a vote for democracy and its greater transparency. People should vote, no matter how.”

Declan Ganley after meeting Václav Klaus, 13 May [More](#)

“It is not true that we have resigned on decency. Of course that we will come out with the policy and ideological part of the campaign, but everything has its time. If Jiří Paroubek and the Social democrats had not caused the fall of the government and thus harmed the image of the Czech Republic and de facto caused international and European disgrace, then of course we probably would not have launched the negative campaign that soon. But unfortunately.”

Jan Zahradil on Good Morning with the Czech Television, 15 April [More](#)

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