

A tour of the European Electoral Campaigns in view of the European Elections (4th-7th June 2009)

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Germany

Date of the election: 7th June (regional and local by-elections on the same day)
Number of MEPs to be elected: 99

2009 is a super electoral year for the Germans, who within one year, will have to vote in general, regional, local, European and even the presidential elections (23rd May next by parliament). On 7th June, the day of the European election, local elections will also take place in the Länder of Bavaria, Saxony and Rhineland-Palatinate.

64 million Germans are being called to ballot including 4.3 million who will be voting for the first time. Turn out will be the greatest challenge to rise to as in all of the other European countries. According to a survey for the European institutions, only 44% of the Germans are aware that the European Parliament will be elected this year and 43% say they will go and vote.

31 political parties and associations are submitting themselves to the citizens' judgment, a first in the country's history. The most important of these groups are Die Linke (Left Party) whose list is being led by Lothar Bisky, the SPD (Social Democratic Party) led by Martin Schulz, chair of the European Socialists' group in the European Parliament since 2004, die Grünen (the Greens) led by Rebecca Harms and Reinhard Bütighofer, the FDP (Liberal Democratic Party) led by young economist Silvana Koch-Mehrin, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) led by present president of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering and the CSU (Social Christian Union) led by Martin Ferber.

Finally the Freie Wähler (Free Voters), who previously declared that they would not run in the European elections, will be present after all. This party rallies those disappointed by the CSU and it won 10.2% of the vote and 21 seats in the regional elections in Bavaria in September 2008. Their list will be led by Gabriele Pauli, former regional representative of the CSU who in October 2006 accused the Minister President of Bavaria at that time, Edmund Stoiber, of having had her spied on, thereby revealing deep divisions within the party, dominant on the Bavarian political stage for several decades.

The key subjects in the electoral campaign of the 'big' parties are unsurprisingly the Lisbon Treaty, the enlargement process and social justice. The CDU has based its electoral campaign on 'A Strong Europe – a safe future' on the upkeep of the subsidiarity principle, an opposition to the forced harmonisation of the social policy and to the integration of Turkey into the Union (it supports a privileged partnership). The CDU is demanding a break in the enlargement process after Croatia's accession. The CSU is requesting the organization of a referendum with regard to any future enlargement. Germany has no experience of the referendum since this is not planned for in the Constitution.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) is highlighting the need for a Social European Union that needs to be built alongside the Economic and Monetary Union together with the

establishment of a Social Stability Pact Europe-wide. The Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) supports a reduction of bureaucracy and is against the creation of any type of European tax - likewise it is also against a Social Europe. The Greens are asking for the development of the Union, a European social policy and the organization of referendum Europe-wide. The Left Party (Die Linke), the only parliamentary party to have voted against the Lisbon Treaty is asking for a referendum on this subject. The party is demanding the replacement of the Stability and Growth Pact by a Pact for Sustainable Development, full employment, social security and the protection of the environment. These European elections are of specific importance in Germany since the election is taking place three months before the general elections on 27th September. The CDU remains in the lead in the polls with 35% of the vote in comparison with 23% for the SPD. The Liberal Democratic Party is on the rise with 16%, the Left Party is credited with 11% of the vote and the Greens 10%.

Austria

Date of the Election: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 17

The Social Democratic Party list (SPÖ) will be led by Hannes Swoboda, the present Vice-President of the European Socialist Party (PES) who will be taking the position of lead candidate for the third time (1999 and 2004). The Social Democratic Party's goal is to maintain the lead position on the political stage. The ruling party has focused its programme on economic and social issues and is highlighting the "defence of the weak" in the economic crisis.

The People's Party's list (ÖVP) will be led by former Home Minister Ernst Strasser, chair of Hilfswerk, an NGO based in Lower Austria, followed by Othmar Karas. Ernst Strasser's choice has led political analysts to believe that the People's Party is about to undertake a "hard" campaign in support of more order and a reduction in immigration. The ÖVP is also trying to assert itself as being the best positioned to work for the country in the future European Parliament whose majority is due to remain within the hands of the European People's Party (EPP), the group to which it belongs.

The Greens may suffer from the absence of Johannes Voggnerhuber, head of the list in 2004 and the major absentee from the ecologist list this year. They will be led by Ulrike Lunacek, the present European Greens' spokesperson. The ecologist party is fighting against the re-election of José Manuel Barroso as head of the European Commission. It is also demanding an energy revolution and the establishment of a minimum social insurance system in the Union.

The Liberal Party (FPÖ) has chosen Andreas Mölzer as its lead candidate and will be campaigning on the economic crisis. Its head of list wants greater cooperation between the rightwing parties in Europe and says it supports an alliance with the Northern League (LN) from Italy. Andreas Mölzer indicated that the Liberal Party may join the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) after the European elections. Finally the Alliance for the future of Austria (BZÖ) is due to appoint Ewald Stadler as head of list, but this choice has not been made official yet. The party has planned to undertake a campaign that focuses on unemployment and social matters. Its leader Heinz-Christian Strache said that his party would defend Austria's sovereignty, identity and neutrality. Finally Hans-Peter Martin decided to stand in the European election with his own list. Former MEP from the Social Democratic Party, eurosceptic Hans-Peter Martin won 14.04% in the last election in 2004.

According to the most recent polls the Social Democratic Party is due to win 31%, just ahead of the People's Party (30%). These two parties will be followed by the Liberal Party, 16%, the Greens, 10%, the Hans-Peter Martin List, 8% and the Alliance for Austria, 5%.

Belgium

Date of the election: 7th June (regional elections on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 22

7, 752, 878 voters are invited to ballot for the European elections on 7th June. The number of non-Belgian European voters totals 63,248 i.e. 10.69% of the potential number of voters (591, 914). On the same day the Belgians will also be voting in their regional elections.

12 lists have officially been recorded by the French college. The Socialist Party (PS) will be led by Jean-Claude Marcourt, the Reform Movement (MR) by European Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Louis Michel and the Humanist Democratic Centre (CDH) by Anne Delvaux who will also feature second on the Walloon Brabant list in the regional elections. The Senator did however announce that she will opt for Europe if she is elected on both lists.

The National Front list (FN) led by the General Secretary Patrick Sessler was rejected initially but finally achieved the missing 280 signatures of the necessary 5,000 in order to stand. However the "Belgium, let's be positive" list and the second FN list put forward by Nicotra were not selected since they did not succeed in collating the vital signatures before 16th April. An amusing fact: Tine van Rompuy, the Prime Minister's sister is running third on the far left list, the Labour Party (PTB+). Again on the far left and for the French speakers the Socialist Struggle Party (Parti Socialiste de lutte – PSL) will be putting forward a joint list with the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR). On the Flemish side its counterpart is called Linkse Socialistische Partij (LSP).

11 lists have been recorded for the Dutch college. Elio di Rupo, Chairman of the French-speaking Socialist Party has called on the Belgians to fight "uniform liberal thought". He is against a second term office for José Manuel Barroso as head of the European Commission. He is demanding that general elections also be organized on 7th June next together with the regional and European elections. "In the next five years I would like to promote Europe in my role as MEP," declared former Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt at the congress organized for the launch of his party's campaign, the Flemish Liberals and Democrats (VLD). In his opinion the election on 7th June will focus on one issue: "Do we want more of Europe or on the contrary are we to fall back into nationalism and protectionism?" Jean-Luc Dehaene will lead the Flemish Christian Democratic Party list (CD&V) of present Prime Minister Herman van Rompuy. Finally populist Senator Jean-Marie Dedecker, former selector for the Belgian Judo team will take the lead position on his own list, the Dedecker List, (LDD) in the European elections. However he has said that he would not take up his seat in Strasbourg and would leave his place to the third person on his list and also his first substitute, Derk Jan Eppink.

Seven parties will be running in the German speaking college. Mathieu Grosch, the only Belgian German speaking MEP who has sat in Parliament since 1994 will lead the CDH list, Resi Stoffels, the PS list, Bernd Gentges, the MR list and Claudia Niessen, the Ecolo list. The country's German speaking community (around 70,000 people) retains a seat in Strasbourg in spite of the reduction of the Belgian delegation that will drop from 24 to 22 members in the next term in office.

In the polls the CD&V is in the lead in Flanders (21.9%) followed by the Dedecker List (16.6%) which is ahead of Open VLD (16.3%). In Wallonia the PS is credited with 27.2% of the vote followed by MR (24.8%), Ecolo (19.7%) and CDH (18.3%). Finally in Brussels the MR is easily dominating with 27.9% of the vote, followed by the PS (19.6%), Ecolo (19.4%) and the CDH (14.5%).

Bulgaria

Election date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 17

The Bulgarians are not showing much interest in the European election since they are extremely interested in the general elections that will follow shortly after the European vote (they are to take place on 5th July at the latest). It has to be said that although most Bulgarians believe that their country's membership of the EU is a good thing they still do not perceive what their role might be in the Union. Moreover the recent modification (approved on 14th April) of the electoral law (and the numerous debates on this subject that lasted several weeks) have led to confusion in the issues at stake in the future elections. Bulgarians do not really know how they will vote in June whether it be in the European or general elections. The vital electoral threshold to achieve to be represented in parliament has been set at 8% for coalitions comprising two parties or more (before it lay at 4% for parties and coalitions). It has stayed at 4% for parties. The rightwing believes that this amendment in the electoral law is directed against them and obeys no political principle. On 15th April, President of the Republic, Gueorgi Parvanov placed his veto on the amendment that established the new threshold indicating that it might be a vector of political instability.

Bulgaria is being severely hit by the economic crisis and witnessed several riots last autumn and winter. Pensioners, students and civil servants and even housewives expressed their discontent and demanded that the government hear their complaints and take measures to counter the effects of the economic crisis and also against corruption that is rotting the country. With foreign investments now declining (down by 15% to 20%), inflation that is due to remain high in 2009 (12.2% in 2008, 6.7% forecast in 2009), a heavily affected trade balance, the government led by Serguey Stanichev (Socialist Party, BSP) has little room to manoeuvre. The latter is undertaking a rigorous budgetary policy even though he recently increased retirement pensions and civil servants' pay. The opposition also accused the government of neglecting deficits in view of the upcoming election in June.

The Socialist Party is being beaten in the polls by a party that is not represented in Parliament, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) led by Boïko Borisov. The Socialists formed a leftwing coalition on 14th April with several other parties (the Bulgarian Social Democrats, the Social Humanism Movement, the Agrarian Union, the Rom Party, the Communist Party and the Patriotic Party of a New Dawn (DAWN)) in view of the European elections.

For their part the United Democratic Forces (ODS) led by Nadezhda Mikhailova, formed a coalition with the Democratic Party for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB) led by former Prime Minister (1997-2001), Ivan Kostov. This coalition may soon open up to other parties such as New Democracy, a dissident movement of the National Movement for Stability and Progress (MNSE), a member of the government.

According to the polls the GERB is due to win the European elections with 26% of the vote. It is due to be followed by the Socialist Party (16%), the Movement for Rights and Freedom (MDL) with 9%, the far right party Ataka (6%) and the rightwing coalition United Democratic Forces-Democratic Forces for a Strong Bulgaria (5%).

Cyprus

Election date: 6th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 6

525,000 people are on the electoral rolls 10,000 of whom do not live on the island – 1, 300 are Cypriots from the Northern Part of the island (who are being allowed to vote for the European Parliament for the first time), 5,000 are citizens of one of the 26 other

Union Member States and 7,400 are first time voters. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus asked to have two of the six Cypriot seats in the European Parliament, a request that was rejected by the authorities. Some people threatened to take the case to the Court of Justice and to demand the cancellation of the European elections on the island.

The main parties will be running in the European election. The campaign has not really started on the island and the population was more interested in the general elections results of 19th April in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Indeed the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Demetris Christofias (Progressive Workers Party, AKEL) elected in February 2008 has taken up negotiations with his counterparts in the North with regard to the reunification of Cyprus after having been frozen for years.

A new political party has entered the European elections race, the Movement for the Reunification of Cyprus (former Free Famagouste Movement founded in May 2006), led by Yoannis Karseras. This party claims to be non partisan and is mainly fighting, as its name indicates, for the reunification of the country. In addition to Yoannis Karseras three other candidates will be running: Stelios Diogenous (who works in tourism), Marianna Economides (who works in education) and Christos Orphanides (chairman of the Greek Expats Union of Pont-Euxin, Panayia Soumela).

Denmark

Election date: 7th June (referendum on the order of succession to the throne on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 13

Over the last few weeks the Danish political stage has been taken up with speculation over the candidature and the appointment of Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to NATO. On 5th April last Finance Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen became the new Head of the Danish government.

The campaign for the European elections has therefore not really started. In the wake of the international economic crisis Denmark's membership of the Economic and Monetary Union has been the focus of debate. A parliamentary session was devoted to this in January during which the government maintained its support of membership without deciding however on a timetable.

Traditionally the European election is an opportunity for the eurosceptic movements (the People's Movement against the European Union and the June Movement) to make a break-through. The People's Movement want Denmark to leave the European Union whilst the June Movement which supports Denmark's membership of the Union wants it to retain the opt-out clauses that the country benefits from in terms of foreign and security policy, police and justice and also with regard to Monetary Union. From 1979 to 1999, these two parties won around 20% of the vote. However these movements only won 13% in 2004. On the eve of the European elections the issue at stake is as follows: will the Social Democratic Party succeed in maintaining its 2004 result or will the eurosceptic movements make progress?

Turn out should be higher than recorded five years ago because on the same day as the European election there will be a referendum on the modification of the order of succession to the throne (the throne should be handed to the sovereign's first child whatever the sex; at present the young son takes priority over the eldest daughter). The Danish Constitution stipulates that 40% of the electorate must vote in support of the change for it to be adopted.

The Conservative Party list (KF) will be led by Bendt Bendtsen who resigned from his position as Trade and Industry Minister. The Liberal Party (V) chose its spokesperson, Jens Rohde as its lead candidate. The People's Party list (DF), a far-right eurosceptic party, will be led by a young 28 year-old, Morten Messerschmidt. In the Social Democratic Party (SD), Dan Dan Jørgensen, relatively unknown to the man on the street, will replace PES leader, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, who in 2004, won a record number of votes.

Margrethe Auken will lead the People's Socialist Party list (SF), previously eurosceptic but now in support of European integration (but still against Denmark joining the Economic and Monetary Union and also against the CAP), Sofie Carsten Nielsen, 33, will replace MEP Anders Samuelsen as head of the Social Liberal Party list (RV) since the latter created the New Alliance in 2007. Finally as for the eurosceptics, the June Movement list, will be led by Hanne Dahl and the People's Movement against the European Union will be led by Søren Søndergaard.

The polls credit the Social Democratic Party with 26.4% of the vote, the Liberal Party 22%, the People's Socialist Party 17.4%, the Conservative Party 12.1%, the People's Movement against the European Union 4%, the Danish People's Party 12%, the Social Liberal Party 3.9% and the June Movement 2.2%.

Spain

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 50

Two former ministers will lead the main two Spanish parties' lists in the European elections on 7th June: Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, former Justice Minister (2004-2007) and present secretary general will be the lead candidate of the Socialist Workers' Party, (PSOE) (Ramon Jauregui, secretary general of the Socialist group in the Congress will be his second) and Jaime Mayor Oreja, former Home Minister (1996-2001) and outgoing MEP will represent the People's Party (PP). The main opposition party wants to turn this European election into a vote against José Luis Zapatero's government (PSOE). Another outgoing MEP Willy Meyer will lead the United Left list (IU).

The Progress and Democracy Union list (UPyD) is being led by Francisco Sosa Wagner. The party leader, Rosa Díez, started her campaign on 15th April to collate the necessary 15,000 signatures for her list to stand. She has criticized the two main Spanish parties which in her opinion are trying to make these European elections into a referendum on the present government's policy.

One of the issues in this election is the upkeep of the GalEusCa coalition, the acronym for Galicia, Euskadi and Catalunya, which Convergencia i Union de Catalunya (CiU), the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), the Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG) and the Socialist Party of Mallorca-Nationalist Entesa (PSM-EN) formed in 2004 – finally this year this coalition has not been maintained. Convergencia i Union de Catalunya (CiU), the National Basque Party (PNV) and the Canaries Coalition decided to join forces in a European coalition for the 7th June election. They have been joined by the Andalusian Party (PA), the Mallorca Union, the Minorca Union and the Nationalist Valencia Bloc (BNV). The European Coalition which will be led by Ramón Tremosa hopes to win at least one seat in Strasbourg and says that it will be a perfect representative of each of the parties which belong to it. The BNG has chosen to form a joint list with the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), Aralar, Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), the Chunta Aragonesista (CA), and the Socialist Party of Mallorca-Nationalist Entesa-Greens. Their list will be led by Oriol Junqueras.

Miguel Duran, former chairman of the ONCE and of the TV channel Telecinco will lead the Libertas list. He hopes to increase turnout by encouraging the eurosceptics to vote on 7th June who in fact had planned to abstain.

The 1st February census revealed that 275,732 citizens from the 26 others EU states are registered to vote in Spain, there were 123,642 in 2004 (and 55,098 five years earlier). Most of these are British (75,623) followed by the Germans (33,632) and the Italians (29,502). 46,117 Romanians and 8,251 Bulgarians are also registered and will be taking part in their first European elections. The province of Alicante receives the greatest share of Union citizens. In some of its areas such as Las Marinas or Vega Baja non-Spanish European citizens represent over 45% of the population.

The most recent polls give the upper hand to the People's Party which is due to win 40.2% of the vote in comparison with 37.4% for the PSOE. The Progress and Democracy Union is due to win 5.2% and the coalition led by Oriol Junqueras, 6.1%.

Estonia

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 6

Prime Minister Andrus Ansip's Reform Party's list (ER) will be led by former Foreign Minister (2002-2005) and present Vice-President of the Riigikogu, Kristiina Ojuland. In second and third positions are present Foreign Minister, Urmas Paet, and eurosceptic MP Igar Gräzin who campaigned for the "no" in the referendum on Estonia's membership of the European Union. Estonia's security with regard to Russia and the European Funds are the two main themes in the party's programme. These two subjects are, in the eyes of most Estonians, the main reason why their country joined the EU.

The Centre Party (K) will be led by the Mayor of Tallinn, Edgar Savisaar. The latter has however said that he would not sit in the European Parliament. He is addressing the European election mainly from a national point of view, as proven by his campaign slogan "Estonia needs change", adopted on 18th April at the same time as his electoral programme. Edgar Savisaar wants to turn these European elections into a protest vote against the three parties in the government coalition.

The Pro-Patria Union-Res Publica (IRL) will be led by MEP Tunne Kelam. The Social Democratic Party list (SDE) will be led by the present Budget Minister Ivari Padar. In second position comes MEP Katrin Saks and number three is MEP Marianne Mikko. Marek Strandberg will lead the Greens. The chairman of the Libertas Party of Estonia, Jaan Laas has said they he will take part in the European elections but he still has not handed in his list. Founded on 2nd March it was previously called the Democratic Party, and this succeeded the Blue Party (1994) in 1999. In February last the Democratic Party was threatened with dissolution after a court decision was taken since the number of its members was below the legal threshold 1000. Finally the Russians of Estonia will present a single list, the United Left Party (Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei) led by the Mayor of Maardu, Georgi Böstrov. Five years ago two parties defending the interests of the Russian speaking minority were in the race: the Russian Party (VEE) and the Social Demcoratic Labour Party, which became the United Left Party. Georgi Böstrov stood as an independent.

In spite of this single list one of the young Russian speaking movement leaders, Nochnoi Dozor (Nightwatch), Dimitri Klenski said that he might stand as an independent. The head of the National Movement (Eesti Rahvuslik Liikumine), Martin Helme, a notorious eurosceptic, has chosen to stand as an independent. Finally Indrek Tarand, son of Social Democratic MEP Andres Tarand and present director of the War Museum of Estonia will also be standing as an independent.

Sociologist Juhan Kivirähk believes that the Pro-Patria Union-Res Publica (IRL) has a good chance of winning seats in the European elections since its lead candidate MEP Tunne Kelam undertook very high profile work during his term in office. Likewise the sociologist recalls the loyalty of the Centre Party electorate, a major advantage in any election; he believes that the Reform Party and the Social Democrats will both win on seat in the European Parliament. Finally Juhan Kivirähk believes that the independent candidate Indrek Tarand is due to win the votes of an angry electorate and win points off the Social Democratic Party and the Pro-Patria Union without however winning enough votes to be elected.

The polls forecast a win for the Centre Party (33% of the vote) followed by the Reform Party (26%, i.e. its weakest result since 2006). Then come Pro-Patria Union-Res Publica and the Social Democratic Party (14% each).

Finland

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 13

13 political parties will be running in the European elections. Ville Itälä will lead the Conservative Assembly (KOK) list on which features MEP Ari Vatanen who sits in the European Parliament at present amongst the French of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). Anneli Jäätteenmäki is the lead candidate for the Centre Party (KESK), Liisa Jaakonsaari, is running for the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Minna Sirniö for the Left Alliance (VAS), Satu Hassi for the Greens (VIHR), Charly Salenius-Pasternak for the Swedish People's Party (SFP) and Timo Soini for the far right party, the Real Finns (PS). The latter was the source of surprise when he put forward his candidature. A eurosceptic who previously declared that he could not take on the role of MEP and his national functions together, now says he has changed his opinion and wants to work in Europe in reaction to the way the European Union showered disdain on the Irish "no" in the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. The Real Finns have allied themselves with the Christian Democrats in this election.

The Centre Party hopes to find victory again after difficult local elections (lost for the first time) in October last. The Social Democrat manifesto highlights solidarity, citizens' rights in terms of consumption and social security, global warming, financial market regulation, social affairs and education.

The chairmen of the parties represented in Parliament except for Timo Soini, signed a text in which they promised to fight against any racist acts or words that might arise during the European election campaign.

According to the polls the Conservative Assembly is due to retain four seats in the European Parliament, the Centre Party is forecast to lose one (dropping from four to three), the Social Democratic Party is due to keep its three seats, the Left Alliance and the Greens will also keep their seat and the Real Finns will probably win one.

France

Election Date: 6th (overseas) and 7th June (mainland)

Number of MPs to be elected: 72

The campaign for the European elections has just started in France. The main parties running for the votes are as follows:

- The Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), allied to the New Centre (NC), members of the present government;
- The Socialist Party (PS), the main opposition party led by Martine Aubry;
- The Democratic Movement (MoDem) led by François Bayrou;
- The Communist Party (PC), allied with the Left Party (PG), created by Jean-Luc Mélenchon (ex-PS) on this occasion;
- The Greens which bring together ecologists who are not members of the party and the anti-globalisation movement including José Bové, candidate in the last presidential election in 2007 (1.32% of the vote) and notorious opponent to the European Constitution during the referendum on 29th May 2005;
- The Front national (FN), a far right party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen;
- The New Anti-Capitalist Party, a far left party led by Olivier Besancenot;
- Workers' Struggle (LO), a far left party led by Nathalie Arthaud;
- Republic Arise, a rightwing sovereignist party led by Nicolas Dupont-Aignan;
- The Movement for France (MPF) led by Philippe de Villiers allied in this election with Hunting, Fishing and Traditions (CPNT) and which is running under the Libertas banner.

The parties in power (UMP and NC) are relying on the work undertaken during the French Presidency of the Union in the second half of 2008 to mobilise the French and convince

them that Europe can act in their interest. The UMP still has not completed its lists. Its slogan is "When Europe wants, it can" and it wishes a more political Europe.

The left wing parties (PS and FG) want to turn these European elections into a protest vote against the government in power. They are suggesting to reboost the economy thanks to investments and are demanding a more social Europe. The PS is in favour of fiscal harmonization in the Union to put a halt to relocation. The Left Front is defending a vote to break from liberal Europe and all of its treaties including that of Lisbon.

The Greens and the Democratic Movement, which are highly committed to Europe and which often achieve good results in this election are asking for greater European integration even though they also position themselves with regard to the policy undertaken by Nicolas Sarkozy. The Greens have an extremely ecological manifesto and are suggesting "an alternative society model to globalised liberalism".

The MoDem is asking for greater European integration the only means, in its opinion, to settle the present crisis before which the States stand impotent.

Finally the far left is protesting against the European Union which is associates, at least since 1995, with economic liberalism. For the right and far right sovereignists the European election presents an opportunity to express their euroscepticism.

The most recent BVA poll credits the UMP with 27% of the vote, the PS 25%, the MoDem 12% and the Greens 10%. The NPA is due to win 7%, the MPF-CPNT 5% and the Left Front 3%.

Greece

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 22

Not much has been said yet about the European elections in the political news but these will take place within an extremely polarised political context. The country is still greatly disturbed by the riots that broke out in autumn last and which remain sporadic. The political parties are therefore still busy managing domestic problems. In addition to this both majority and opposition failed a few weeks ago to agree on measures to apply to face the economic crisis. The weak majority enjoyed by New Democracy (ND) in power and recent events long led observers to conclude that early general elections might be organized on 7th June next in parallel to the European election. The opposition parties demanded this on several occasions and this was rejected however by Prime Minister Caramanlis's New Democracy. According to polls most Greeks were against it also.

For the time being the parties are finalising their lists and few of them have started their campaign. The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) led by George Papandreou, also chair of the Socialist International launched his campaign on 24th April last. The Socialist leader who would like these European elections to be a referendum on the ruling power attributed responsibility for the present international economic crisis to the European liberal parties. "The world is experiencing a deep economic and political crisis that has been caused by neo-conservative policies and rightwing ideology whereby the market self-regulates." George Papandreou said the European socialists wanted to establish a "green development" model that would guarantee employment, prosperity and social justice.

The feeling of insecurity amongst the population and the many scandals and accusations of corruption against New Democracy (ND) provide PASOK with the upper hand – in the polls at least. However more recent surveys show the gap between the two parties is narrowing as the weeks go by. According to a poll published on 27th April last PASOK is due to win 37% of the vote and New Democracy 34%. The Radical Left Coalition (SYN) led by Alekos Alavanos, a party which seems to be tempted by a more eurosceptic position than in the past is due to win 8.5%; the Communist Party (KKE) 8%; the Greens 5% and finally the far right, the People's Orthodox Assembly (Laos) led by journalist George Karatzaferis, 4.5%. New Democracy is still confident however of its chance of reversing the trend and hopes to convince the Greeks of the need to reform.

Hungary

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 22

By announcing the date of the European elections on 26th March the President of the Republic, László Sólyom effectively launched the campaign. The main opposition party, the Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPP), published its list on 17th January and it will be led by Pál Schmitt, the present Deputy Chair of the European People's Party (EPP). The ruling Socialist Party's list (MSZP) will be led by present Foreign Minister Kinga Göncz. Another specific feature of this list: the number of women. Three women feature at the top: apart from Kinga Göncz, Edit Herczog and Zita Gurmai have taken 2nd and 3rd places. The Free Democratic Alliance list (SZDSZ) is being led by outgoing MEP Istvan Szent-Ivanyi, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Strasbourg. The Democratic Forum (MDF) was the source of surprise when it granted lead candidate position to Lajos Bokros, former Finance Minister in the Horn government (1994-1998), known for his infamous "reform package" that made him extremely unpopular. His appointment was considered by many MDF members as a betrayal and several of them left the parliamentary group that was then dissolved. Finally the far right party the Jobbik's list (Movement for a better Hungary), is led by lawyer Krisztina Morvai. Whilst the government parties are facing major domestic and foreign problems this party may very well be the source of surprise in this election.

The economic crisis is the main theme in FIDESZ's campaign which has decided to be very frugal in its spending. The MSZP which is experiencing one of the most serious crises in its history believes that its failure is almost inevitable. The party has therefore decided to focus on governance problems. The SZDSZ is trying to increase turn out by talking to the population and by communicating on the MEPs work and on Europe's responses to globalization, climate change and the economic crisis. As for Jobbik it is undertaking a campaign on its favourite theme: "Hungary belongs to Hungarians".

The polls grant an important advantage to FIDESZ-MPP, credited with 66% in the polls and 23% to MSZP.

Ireland

Election Date: 5th June (local elections on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 12

The campaign has not really started and the media are showing that the major stakes are national, notably economic (present economic crisis, health, education agriculture) and even local – the Irish are also voting on 5th June to renew their local representatives. The main opposition party Fine Gael (FG) is undertaking a hard campaign against Fianna Fail (FF) in power.

The Libertas party will also be running for the first time in Ireland in two constituencies. Its founder Declan Ganley, a candidate in the North West has said he would give up his campaign against the Lisbon Treaty if he failed to win a seat as MEP, a position he would so much like to occupy. Finally Fianna Fail has just left the UEN group (Union for Europe of the Nations), too diverse and far too eurosceptic to its taste, to join the Alliance of Democrats and Liberals for Europe (ALDE).

The most recent survey reveals the following trends: Fine Gael, 30% Fianna Fail, 23% (losing ground), Labour Party (Lab), 22%, Sinn Fein (SF), far right party against the Lisbon Treaty and main beneficiary of Fianna Fail's decline 11% and the Greens 6%.

Italy

Election Date: 6th and 7th June (provincial and local by-elections on those days)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 72

The creation of the People's Freedom Party (Pdl) after the merger of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia with the National Alliance (AN) led by Gianfranco Fini has been the main event in Italian political life over the last few weeks. "The birth of the People's Freedom Party is a positive thing for Italy. It simplifies the national political framework and brings us out of a period of confusion and dispute," stressed opposition leader and chair of the Democratic Party (PD) Dario Franceschini.

Silvio Berlusconi will be lead candidate on each of the lists put forward by his party. He hopes to win 51% of the vote nationally. The Democratic Party (PD) is protesting against this decision which it considers illegal. "He is the only Head of Government in the world who in the next few months, instead of working day and night to settle family and company issues, will be undertaking an electoral campaign," declared Dario Franceschini. The main opposition party is protesting against the candidature of any regional or local representative and even anyone who is under prosecution for any type of crime. The Democratic Party will present lists with equal numbers of men and women. MPs (and some candidates) of the Democratic Party founded in April 2007, are specific in that they are spread amongst two groups in the European Parliament: the members of the former Daisy party belong to the Alliance of Democrats and Liberals of Europe (ALDE) whilst the members of the former Left Democrats (DS) belong the Party of European Socialists (PES). The Democratic Party has also said that it would not join the latter party after the elections.

The Northern League (LN), Silvio Berlusconi's main ally in government is however undertaking a separate campaign in the European election. "From now on and until the European elections we are rivals," declared the Northern League leader, Roberto Castelli. The Movement for Autonomy (MPA) founded in 2005 by Raffaello Lombardo, previously allied to the People's Freedom Party decided to run with The Right (D), Francesco Storace's party, in these European elections.

Philosopher Gianni Vattimo joined the Italy of Values list (IDV) led by Antonio di Pietro.

Just two months before the election the campaign has not really started in Italy where for the last few weeks news items have been mostly focused on the earthquake that happened on 6th April in the Abruzzo region.

Polls grant an easy lead to the People's Freedom Party, credited with 52% of the vote and 30% to the Democratic Party.

Latvia

Election Date: 6th June (local elections on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 8

The European elections are yet not really on the agenda. The country whose economy relied heavily on domestic consumption, a booming property market and an easy loan policy has been the hardest hit by the economic crisis in the European Union. At the end of 2008 the Latvian economy had declined to its 2005 level. Until recently it had been nicknamed the "Baltic Tiger"; Latvia was saved from bankruptcy at the end of the year by IMF (1.68 billion \$) and European Union (3.1 milliards €) loans. At the turn of this year riots irrupted in the streets of Riga, with demonstrators, employees, farmers etc. protesting against politicians' incompetence since they had allowed the country to sink into crisis. After two coalition members decided to withdraw their support, Ivars Godmanis - who vainly suggested in January that the rightwing opposition join his government - resigned on 20th February. The political crisis which had been brewing for several months was rekindled by the economic crisis. MEP Valdis Dombrovskis from the centre-right party, New Era, and former Finance Minister from 2002 to 2004 replaced Ivars Godmanis as Prime Minister.

There are 17 lists running in the European elections including New Era led by Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš, the Pro-Patria Union and Freedom led by Roberts Zīle, Civilian Union led by former Foreign Minister (2002-2004) Sandra Kalniete, Latvia's First-Latvia's Way led by former Prime Minister Ivar Godmanis, Libertas.lv led by former Prime Minister (1997-1998) Guntars Krasts, the People's Party (TP) led by Rihards Pīks, Social Democratic

Party led by Atis Lejiņš, For Human Rights in a United Latvia led by Tatjana Ždanoka and The Harmony Centre (SC), a Russian-speaking movement led by former journalist of the First Baltic Channel, Nils Usakovs, who was the source of surprise in the last general elections in October 2006 when he won 14.46% of the vote, will be led by Alfred Rubiks, imprisoned in 1991 for his support of the Soviet repression at the time of Latvia's independence (he was released in 1997),

"The Harmony Centre and For Human Rights in a United Latvia will have MEPs because they can count on the Russian-speaking electorate whilst the Latvian electorate is divided and there is a choice between a great number of different parties," says Atis Lejiņš, lead candidate for the Social Democratic Party in this election and half of whose list is made up of women.

The most recent polls credit the Harmony Centre and New Era with 20.4% of the vote, the Farmers' Union and Greens 14.3%, the People's Party 12.3%, For Human Rights in a United Latvia 8.9% and Pro-Patria Union and Freedom 7.4%.

Lithuania

Election Date: 7th June (possible second round of the presidential election on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 12

17 parties are running in the European elections in Lithuania i.e. five more than in 2004. The Social Liberal Party will be absent from the election since it did not deliver its lists in time. In the first European elections, parties presented numerous candidates from the civil society very aware of the running of the European institutions. According to the polls the Homeland Union-Conservatives (TS-LK) is due to win the elections and 18% of the vote ahead of the Social Democratic Party (LSP), 13%. Three other parties are due to win between 8% and 9% of the vote: For Order and Justice (TT), the Labour Party (DP) and the Liberal Union-Centre Union (LLC-LSC).

The result will very much depend on the presidential election, the second round of which is planned for 7th June on the day of the European election. But this might not be necessary if we believe in the significant lead held by independent candidate, Dalia Grybauskaitė, European Commissioner for the Budget and Financial Programming just a few weeks from the first round on 17th May (73.6%). If this is the case turn out in the European elections may be low, which will be to advantage of the traditional parties (Homeland Union-Conservatives and the Social Democratic Party) whose electorate is more stable and stronger. According to a poll by Sprinter Tyrimai 42% of the Lithuanians say they will go and vote and 46% do not think they will. In 2004 these figures were 51% and 37% respectively. Turn out finally lay at 48.38%.

The most recent polls provide the Homeland Union-Conservatives with a clear lead (18% of the vote) to be followed by For Order and Justice (12%), the Social Democratic Party (9.2%) and the Labour Party (8.5%). The presidential election is the focus of political debate.

Luxembourg

Election Date: 7th June (general elections on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 6

The present European Commissioner for Information Society and Media, Viviane Reding is the lead candidate on the Christian Social Party (PCS/CVS). The five other members are Georges Bach, Frank Engel, Astrid Lulling, outgoing MEP, Tania Matias and Roger Weber.

Simone Asselborn-Bintz will lead the Socialist Workers Part list (POSL/LSAP) followed by Claude Frisoni, Ginette Jones, Robert Goebbels, René Kollwelter and Jos Scheuer.

Véronique Bruck will lead the Democratic Party list (DP/DP) which includes Léonie Grethen, Vronny Kriepps, Max Kuborn and Kik Schneider.

The Action for Democracy and Justice for Pensions (ADR) list is 100% male: Robert Mehlen, party chairman, Jean Colombara, two outgoing MPs – Gast Gibéryen and Jacques-Yves Henckes –, Fernand Kartheiser and Roy Reding.

Claude Turmes, outgoing MEP, will lead the ecologist list Dei Greng/the Greens (V), followed by Nuria Garcia and Manuel Huss.

The Communist Party candidates (PCL/KPL) are Ali Ruckert, party chairman, Bernard Zénon, Aloyse Bisdorff, Catarina Fernandes Ribeiro, who is Portuguese, Christoph Kühnemund, a German and Hela-Georgette Schweich. The Dei Lenk/the Left (DL) list will be led by André Hoffmann and the Biergerlëscht (Citizens' List) by independent MP Aly Jaerling. The latter list stands to represent the 44% of Luxembourgers who voted "no" in the referendum on the European Constitution in July 2005. Against the Lisbon Treaty its members want a popular vote to be organized on this text.

The Socialist Workers Party would like to raise the quota of women from 30% to 50% (in all elections). René Kollwelter wants to separate the general from the European elections (Luxembourg is organising these two elections on the same day) and is suggesting that foreigners be able to vote in all of the elections organised in the Grand Duchy.

In 2004 11,680 citizens of other Member States voted in Luxembourg i.e. 5% of the population. This figure does not seem to have increased significantly in 2009. The electoral law may be modified however since the number of years of obligatory residence to be able to vote has been reduced (2 years).

Malta

Election Date: 6th June (local by-elections on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 5

Around 30 people are running in the election. The Labour Party (MLP), the main opposition party is putting 12 candidates forward (including three outgoing MEPs) and the Nationalist Party (PN) in power, 10 candidates (including 2 outgoing MEPs). Other 'small' parties – Democratic Alternative (AD), the Greens, National Action (AN), a far-right populist party created on 9th June 2007 and led by Josie Muscat, Libertas and the Liberals – will also be running, presenting up to three candidates in some cases. Mary Gaulti will be the Libertas candidate in the archipelago.

According to the most recent poll, the Labour Party is due to win three seats whilst its nationalist rival is due to win two.

Netherlands

Election Date: 4th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 25

The Labour Party (PVdA) is being led by Thijs Berman. This party has focused its campaign on four main themes: international policy and Human Rights; energy, global warming and food security; social policy, good governance and justice.

The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) is being led by Wim Van de Camp. The party is fighting for a strong Netherlands in a stable European Union. It says it is in favour of greater integration and is campaigning on subjects such as immigration, security, the fight against terrorism, and also agricultural policy, energy and global warming. Hans van Baalen will be the lead candidate for the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). The party is reticent about any further enlargement, is against a federal Europe, hopes for a reform of the CAP and communitarisation of the immigration and asylum policy. Democrats 66 (D66) will be led by MEP Sophie in't Veld. The party hopes to highlight the three following themes: energy, security and education.

Five other "small" parties are also running: the Socialist Party (SP), the Green Left (GL), the Christian Union (CU), The Reformed Political Party (SGP) and the Freedom Party

(PvdV). The PvdV leader, Geert Wilders is suggesting the abolition of the European Parliament. He is campaigning on the "no" to Turkey, the exclusion of Romania and Bulgaria from the Union and the limitation of the European executive to one single Commissioner, since he believes the Union should only take care of the single currency and economic cooperation.

The most recent polls declare the Freedom Party as the leader in the Netherlands with 21.3% of the vote, followed by the Christian Democratic Appeal (19.3%) and the Labour Party (16%). Democrats 66 are due to win 11.3%, the Socialist Party and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, 11.3% and the Green Left 7.3%.

Poland

Election date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 50

The Polish political parties are completing their lists. Above all this election is an opportunity for a new confrontation between the two main parties in the country – the Civic Platform (PO) in power and Law and Justice (PiS) chaired by Jaroslaw Kaczynski (Lech Kaczynski, his twin brother is President of the Republic).

The Civic Platform is counting on its opening to other parties and is rallying independents or people from various political environments on its list – these include Danuta Hübner (European Commissioner for Regional Policy), who lies to the left on the political scale and Marian Krzaklewski, former Solidarnosc leader and founder in 1996 of the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) which lies rather more to the right. Severely beaten in the general elections in 2001 AWS and Marian Krzaklewski disappeared from the political arena. Civic Platform is also counting on the European experience of its candidates: Róża Thun (head of the Representatives of the European Commission in Poland and former Chairwoman of the Polish Schuman Foundation), Jerzy Buzek (outgoing MEP and Prime Minister from 1997 to 2001) and even Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the European Parliament). The party, which has 14 seats in Strasbourg at present, wants to win 25 seats and thereby strengthen its position within the EPP, the European People's Party.

Law and Justice is trusting its loyal voters and national MPs who do not have much to do with Europe such as Jacek Kurski and Zbigniew Ziobro (former Justice minister). The party is intending to campaign on the economic crisis, which it blames the government in place for. The weekly *Polityka* wonders about the revival of the far-right in Poland (League of Families, LPR and Samoobrona, SO) which was the major winner in the European elections in 2004, notably due to extremely low turnout.

Although the PiS has managed to remain ahead of the League of Families and Samoobrona over the last five years it may very well lose voters from its rightwing because of its trend towards the centre that started in 2008 with the aim of providing Jaroslaw Kaczynski with the image of a moderate, modern, open leader. This is why it might find it difficult in rallying the centre and far right traditionalist and nationalist electorate.

Finally the left failed in putting forward a united list in Poland – three lists were due to be presented.

The Civic Platform is in the lead in the polls (58% of the vote), with Law and Justice due to win 27% and all of the leftwing lists, 5%.

Portugal

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 22

Paulo Rangel will lead the Social Democratic Party list (PSD) the main opposition party of which he is chair in parliament. Vital Moreira will head the list of the Socialist Party (PS) in power in Lisbon since 2005 and which will be vying for another term in office in the

autumn. Nuno Melo will lead the People's Party list (CDS/PP), Miguel Portas that of the Left Bloc (BE) where we find the party's leader, Marisa Matias in second position and historian Rui Tavares in third. Ilda Figueiredo will lead the Communist Party list (PCP). Amongst the small parties Laurinda Alves will be leading the Portugal Hope Movement and Frederico Durate Carvalho that of the Monarchist People's Movement.

At the beginning of the year the Parliament approved amendments to the electoral law repealing the proxy vote and therefore obliging voters to go to a consulate to fulfil their civic duty. The government justified its reform saying that the proxy vote comprised a potential means for electoral fraud. President of the Republic Aníbal Cavaco Silva did however place a veto against this change explaining that the proposal would provoke abstention since it would oblige thousands of people to travel hundreds if not thousands of kilometres to undertake their fundamental right." The head of State did not promulgate the law.

Prime Minister José Sócrates (PS) is supporting the re-appointment of the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and this "whatever the result of the European elections." "It is patriotic support" he declared adding that he was not the only socialist to support the outgoing President (José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Gordon Brown have declared their preference for the outgoing President). This support was the cause of tension within the party. At the beginning of April, Vital Moreira, head of the party's list in the European elections indicated that the Party of European Socialists should have its own candidate to challenge José Manuel Barroso. Likewise former President of the Republic and founder of the Socialist Party, Mario Soares qualified José Manuel Barroso "as a face of the past" recalling that he had been the host of the "summit of shame" which brought together George Bush, Tony Blair and José Maria Aznar in March 2003, just a few days before the start of the Anglo-American intervention in Iraq. The latest polls credit the Socialist Party with 36.7% of the vote, 28.4% to the Social Democratic Party, 12.6% to the Left Bloc and 9.4% to the People's Party.

Czech Republic

Election date: 5th June (afternoon) and 6th June (morning)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 22

33 parties are running including the five biggest: the Social Democratic Party (CSSD), that lies to the left of the political scale, the Democratic Civic Party (ODS), that lies to the right, the Communist Party of Moravia (KSCM), Christian Democratic Union/People's Party (KDU-CSL) and the Greens (Z). The Democratic Green Party founded by two MEPs formerly members of the Green Party will also be running.

But the most important event has happened in two eurosceptic parties: Libertas and the Free Citizens Party (SSP). Libertas was created by Vladimír Zelený, presently an MEP, co-founder and previous owner of TV channel Nova, famous for the corruption trial which brought him into conflict with R. Lauder to whom he sold his TV channel. The Libertas list leader is Vlastimil Tlustý, MPs who has been with the Civic Democratic Party until now. Vladimír Zelený is in second position and Jan Schwippel, another MP, member of the Civic Democratic Party is third.

The Free Citizens Party was created in January 2009 by Peter Mach, director of the Center for Economics and Politics, a think-tank that tends towards the eurosceptic Czech president Václav Klaus. In December 2008 Václav Klaus resigned from his position as honorary chair of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), notably because of his opposition to the party's position which he believes too pro-European. His two sons, Jan and Klaus also quit the party. The two eurosceptic parties are demanding a reform of the European institutions and better protection of Member States' national sovereignty.

According to political analysts, turnout is not due to rise to 30% mainly because of the collapse of the government led by Mirek Topolánek in March last. With their government voters will have also lost the main reason for going to ballot i.e. to express their opinion about the government's work.

Jan Fischer, manager of the Statistics Office takes over with a government of experts on 8th May – this will comprise 15 people chosen in equal numbers between the Civic Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. His term in office is limited in time (six months) and politically (he is responsible for preparing the 2010 budget, to fight against the economic crisis and to manage the administration of the country).

According to the latest polls the Social Democratic Party is due to win 38% of the vote, the Civic Democratic Party 36%, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia 12%, the Christian Democratic Union/People's Party 6% and the Greens 4%.

Romania

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MPs to be elected: 33

The political parties are working on their candidate lists. The National Liberal Party (PNL), the party that is in the opposition was the first to have appointed its candidates only 8 of whom appear to be eligible however. In 2007 during the first European elections the Prime Minister at the time, Calin Popescu Tariceanu had called on people who were not members of the party such as Renate Weber or Daniel Daianu. This year the new party chair Crin Antonescu preferred to choose party members. Norica Nicolai, Deputy Chair is heading the list on which feature Adina Valean (a choice that has led to a great number of articles because she is said to be having an affair with Crin Antonescu) and Renate Weber. The main absentees from the list are former Finance Minister Daniel Daianu and Adrian Cioroianu.

Whilst Elena the daughter of the President of the Republic, Traian Basescu, has managed to find the 100,000 signatures necessary to stand as an independent candidate, the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) confirmed that former Prime Minister (who resigned), Theodor Stolojan was the head of their list. He is followed by Monica Macovei, a new recruit to the party and former Justice Minister and Traian Ungureanu. The Social Democratic Party list (PSD) has the following candidates at the top of their list: Adrian Severin, Rovana Plumb, Yoan-Mircea Pascu.

The poll by CCSB, published on 28th April last provides the PDL with a slight lead (31% of the vote) over the PSD-PC (30%). The PNL is due to win 16% of the vote, the PRM 8% and the UDMR 5%. 8% of the electorate says they are ready to vote for Elena Basescu.

The United Kingdom

Election date: 4th June (local by-elections on the same day)

Number of MEPs to be elected: 72

The Conservative Party announced that it is going to leave the European People's Party (EPP) and form a new group with Law and Justice (PiS) led by Polish President Lech Kaczynski after the next European elections. If the Conservatives win they intend to push through a law stipulating that any future law adopted by the European Parliament would be subject to a referendum of the British people. The Labour Party is highlighting themes of social justice and the environment. The Liberal Democrats have not yet defined the central themes to their campaign. Pro-European and in favour of a federal Europe and the adoption of the euro they would however like the UK to retain its opting-out clause in terms of working hours for example and they are against Brussels imposing an obligatory retirement age.

The party which causes a problem is the British National Party (BNP) - according to the polls it is at its most popular point ever. The economic crisis that has caused unemployment to rise significantly has made the anti-immigration slogans put forward by this far-right party particularly appealing. In addition to this the proportional system, unusual in a country where the first-past-the-post system is applied, is to the National Party's advantage as it is to all "small" parties. From 9% on it can hope for a seat in Strasbourg. Its leader Nick Griffin is running in the North West. The National Party

achieves its best results (according to the polls) in the constituencies of Yorkshire, the Midlands and North West.

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) is demanding the UK's exit from the Union. "We are going to take part in these elections and for the first time we are in the majority. More than half of Britons want to leave the Union and sign a free-trade agreement with the Member States," declared its leader Nigel Farage.

Finally Libertas has been challenged by some rival parties who have taken over the same eurosceptic niche. Like a friend of the Independence Party's leader, who registered the International Libertas movement with the British Electoral Commission forcing Declan Ganley to enrol under a different name, A new dawn for Europe: Libertas.eu.

The latest polls credit the Conservative Party with 41% of the vote, the Labour Party with 30% and the Liberal Democrats 17%.

Slovakia

Election Date: 6th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 13

In 2004, the Slovaks distinguished themselves thanks to their record abstention rate – the highest in Europe (17% turnout). However this was not a sign of euroscepticism, since according to the polls within Europe the Slovaks were amongst the most satisfied with their country's membership of the European Union.

The outgoing MEPs' profile is not very high except for Monika Flašíková-Beňová whose popularity is linked rather more to her private life and her conflicts with the ruling party, Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) and Prime Minister Robert Fico, than to her work for the European Union. Until a few weeks ago the presidential election of 21st March and 4th April last that witnessed the re-election of Ivan Gašparovič, occupied the front stage of political debate in Slovakia.

17 parties are running but five only seem likely to win seats: the Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) whose list is led by Eduard Kukan, Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) which is led by Boris Zala, the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) led as in 2004 by Edit Bauer, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LU-HZDS).

The campaign has started. It is focused on 4 main themes: consumer protection, the budget, security and alternative energy sources. But these do not mean much to Slovak voters who are not very sensitive to environment issues and consumer protection. Many projects are underway to stimulate youth participation. The campaign undertaken by the Centre for European Policy announced – "We have already been 17" referring to age (18 year olds are allowed to vote) and to the 17% turnout rate in 2004.

The polls grant 46% of the vote to Direction-Social Democracy, 13% to the Democratic and Christian Union, 11% to the far right movement and member of the government coalition, the National Party, (SNS), 9% to the Christian Democratic Movement, 8% to the Hungarian Coalition and 6% to the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia.

Slovenia

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 7

New Slovenia (NSi) is the only party to have put forward a list. Winner of the 2004 election and 2nd government party between 2004 and 2008, the party is accustomed to starting its electoral campaigns early. Leading candidate, Alojz Peterle was one of the first to offer his candidature in the presidential election of 2007 which he finally lost to Danilo Türk, who was supported by the left. Another reason for this rapid campaign start by New Slovenia is the party's need to rally 3,000 signatures, vital to be able to run since it is not represented in parliament.

The Social Democratic Party (SD) in power at present is tending towards an open list welcoming personalities from without the party. Its list is being led by Zoran Thaler. The choice of having the former Foreign Minister as lead candidate was a surprise. The People's Party (SLS) is being handicapped since its leader resigned at the end of March. The party will hold its next congress on 16th May but has to deliver its list before 8th May next if it wants to run.

Apart from the parties citizens' groups are also allowed to run if they collate at least 3,000 signatures. Each voter and MP can only give his signature once. Slovenia also makes it obligatory for each list to put forward at least 40% of women and stipulates that each sex has to be represented in the first half of the list (i.e. amongst the first three candidates). As in 2004 it seems however that the majority of lists will be led by men, with women featuring in second position. This explains why the lobby of Slovenian women asked for the parity of electoral lists in March last.

There are two main stakes in this electoral campaign: the economic crisis and Croat-Slovenian relations. The border dispute between the two countries is as old as their independence. Over the last few months it has intensified however with Slovenia going as far as blockading the negotiation process between Croatia and the European Union.

7,000 voters more than in the general elections of September 2008 have registered for these European elections in which a party has to win around 14% of the vote in order to aspire to at least one seat in Strasbourg.

According to the polls the Social Democratic Party is still in the lead in terms of voting intention in this European election.

Sweden

Election Date: 7th June

Number of MEPs to be elected: 18

17 political parties are running: the four parties in the Alliance presently in power:

- The Moderate Assembly Party (M) ;
- The Centre Party (C) ;
- The People's Party-Liberals (FpL) ;
- The Christian Democratic Party (KD)

And the three main opposition parties:

- The Social-Democratic Party (SAP) ;
- The Environment Party-the Greens (MP) ;
- The Left Party (Vp).

Finally the anti-European movement, the June List (Junilistan), will be running.

Amongst the parties not represented in Parliament there are the far right Swedish Democrats (SD), Feminist Initiative (FI), the Pirates Party (PP) created by the internet site Piratsiten, defender of free downloading (but now closed), the European Labour Party, member of the international movement led by American politician Lyndon LaRouche, the far left Kommunistiska Förbundet (KF)), the far right National Democratic Party mainly present in the far south of the country. Finally three parties (Nordic Union, the National Democratic Party, 666 för en super EU-state med projekt 666– 666 for a super European Union by Project 666 (a biblical project for a Europe that protects the world) will also be standing.

Just a month before the election the Swedish are not showing much interest in the European elections. Europe however is not absent from debate since discussion is raging about the cost of future Presidency of the Council of the Union. Stockholm will be taking over from Prague on 1st July – a fact which according to the polls, the Swedish are very much aware of.

The latest poll by Skop credits the Moderate Assembly Party with 31.7% of the vote, the Social Democratic Party with 35.6%, the People's Party-the Liberals with 8.7%, the Environment Party-the Greens, 6.3%, the Left Party 5.1%, the Centre Party 4.3%, the June List 3.5%, the Christian Democratic Party, 3% and the Swedish Democrats 1.3%.

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