EUROPEAN ELECTIONS & DOMESTIC POLITICS

Lessons from the Past and Scenarios for the Future

edited by

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Introduction

Electoral politics in the European Union and the 2004 enlargement

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The 2004 enlargement of the European Union is larger and more ambitious than each of the previous ones. Of the ten new member states, only one (Malta) is a relatively well-established and problem-free democracy, but it is by far the smallest of the new members. Of the rest, Cyprus still struggles with its history of civil war and division between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot territories. The remaining eight (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) were communist states that passed through difficult political and economic transitions in the period after 1989, the consequences of which have not yet always fully materialized. The process leading to the formal admission in May 2004 began long before that moment, but the process of actually integrating the enlarged Union—a process that involves the old and the new member states alike—will still require many years thereafter.

When considering the problems that the EU and its members will undoubtedly have to face in this process, one could conceivably take solace from the successful track record of the Union in integrating new members that (at their time) also had only recently experienced transitions to democratic politics (Greece, Spain, and Portugal). Yet the 2004 enlargement poses more formidable challenges than did earlier enlargements. One reason for
this is that the EU is not the same as the former European Community (EC). The EC was primarily an economic union between sovereign national states. Over the past two decades these national states have transferred much of their sovereignty to the EU, which consequently has increasingly become a political union. The treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Nice in particular increased the breadth of the integration process far beyond that in the 1980s, when Greece, Spain, and Portugal were inducted as new members. Moreover, the number of new members is of a different magnitude than ever before and exceeds that of the three previous enlargements combined. Another important difference is that the new Union of twenty-five member states harbors an even larger variety of historical, political, cultural, and economic differences than the old one. It reaches across the former Iron Curtain into countries that have been separated from the rest of Europe for half a century. It brings together parts of Europe that have traditionally been regarded as ‘of a different nature’ by such renowned historians and social scientists as Eric Hobsbawm and Stein Rokkan.

The enlargement greatly increased the economic inequalities within the Union at a moment when many economies of the old member states were not doing well at all. When Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Ireland joined the EC, the EC invested heavily in their economies, which subsequently experienced impressive growth. However, in 2004 the old member states are very reluctant to have the EU invest on a similar scale in the new member states, and most of them drew up new regulations to prevent citizens from the new countries freely migrating and finding employment in their own economies.

The challenges for the new Union are daunting. It requires new or renewed institutions and procedures to accommodate the interactions between the member states and the Union as a whole. These are still in the making and will be utterly untested at the time they become operative. It will take at least a number of years to assess to what extent proposals generated by the European Convention can be put into practice and will become successes or failures. Likewise, it will take time to evaluate the wisdom, or lack thereof, of the terms of accession of the new member states negotiated in Copenhagen in December 2002.

The Union, its citizens and elections

The 2004 enlargement affects the older member states as well as the new ones. Even before May 2004 the relations between the older member states had changed, to some extent in anticipation of the consequences of the enlargement
to come. The addition of new members will decrease the older ones’ share of power in the Union’s decision-making processes. The older members may expect a deterioration of the balance of their financial contributions to and transfers from the Union. Their industries and workforce will be subjected to new competition, and so on. All the older member states attempted to avert or at least minimize such anticipated effects, which made their mutual relations more contentious than they used to be. The relations between the older member states themselves have also changed because of the restrictions on their budgetary policies that were imposed by the Stability and Growth Pact. This pact was negotiated to ensure that the euro countries would not loosen their financial discipline after introducing the euro. Differences between the older member states in their willingness to adhere to these obligations—particularly after the economic recession of 2001—also contributed to less congenial relations between them.

These conflicts and problems will unavoidably, and probably more so than in the past, provide opportunities in each of the member states for political contestation over the EU and its policies, over the desirable extent and forms of integration, and so on. Such contestation is largely produced by political entrepreneurs (from existing political parties as well as ‘newcomers’) in their quest for political profit via the electoral process. Not only do the elections to the European Parliament offer opportunities (and risks) for parties and politicians who politicize European integration and the EU, but domestic elections in the member states do so as well. And the outcomes of both kinds of elections affect in turn the future course of European integration. The relationship between the Union and its citizens will thus be of increasing importance in the first years after 2004, and particularly to the extent that this relation becomes expressed in national and European elections. Obviously, the relationships between the Union and its citizens are inextricably interwoven with those that connect citizens to the political processes in their own country. Both of these relationships will be under substantial pressure until the most important wrinkles of the enlargement process have been ironed out and new institutions and procedures have proved their worth. Even in the unlikely event that the enlargement process does not generate new problems, the extension of the Union itself, and the concomitant reduction of each individual member state’s influence on Union policy, can easily increase citizens’ apprehensions about a Union that can simply be portrayed as an uncontrolled and uncontrollable Behemoth. How the relationships between the Union, European politicians, domestic politics, and citizens will express themselves in voting behavior and election results can, of course, only be experienced in the years to come. But the basis from which it is to develop can largely be assessed today.
This book focuses on the interplay between European elections, national politics, and the ongoing process of European integration. Below we will set out how national politics affects European elections and vice versa. The book covers the period before the latest enlargement of 2004. Its aim is not to provide a timely description of the most recent developments in electoral, domestic, and European politics. It stands in a longer tradition of comparative research on European elections, which resulted in numerous publications, of which two volumes should be mentioned in particular. The first one is Choosing Europe? a volume edited by van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) based on data collected for the European elections of 1989 and 1994, and the second one is Political representation and legitimacy in the European Union, edited by Schmitt and Thomassen (1999) and based on the European elections of 1994. The current volume covers the period through the European elections of 1999. It aims to do two things. First, it assesses whether and how the character of European elections and of the political representation of citizens’ views regarding European integration have changed over the period through 1999. We investigate the electoral expression of the relationships between citizens, their governments, and their domestic political parties and the EU on the eve of the 2004 enlargement. Second, this book provides a basis for evidence-based conjectures (scenarios) about the complex interactions in the years after 2004 between elites and citizens in the interrelated spheres of domestic and European politics. As such, this book aims not only to set a research agenda for studies about the 2004 elections, but also for those covering the period thereafter.

**European elections and national politics**

In many ways the European Union will, after enlargement as much as before, constitute a level of institutions and policy making that is far removed from its citizens. The existing national identities, the large number of different languages, and the ingrained tendency of citizens, media, parties, and interest groups to look primarily at their own domestic polities hamper the emergence of a Union-wide sphere of political discourse and debate. Moreover, the Union is shielded from popular influence in a myriad of ways. A number of factors contribute to a separation between the Union and its citizens: the absence of trans-European parties and citizens’ groups to organize and voice popular concerns at the Union level, the fragmentation of decision making into separate councils that obstructs the emergence of such parties and groups, the reliance on
the institutions of the member states to execute Union policies, and the fragmentation of the electoral process by electing the European Parliament via a set of concurrent country-specific elections. Research on voting behavior in European elections has repeatedly shown that national concerns motivate party choice in European elections, the reason why Reif and Schmitt (1980) have labeled them second-order national elections. One of the themes running through this book is how European elections are affected by national politics.

The second main topic of this book is how national politics and elections are affected by European politics and elections. From this perspective it is important to realize that the shielding of the Union from its population operates in one direction only. Europe's population is not insulated from the consequences of Union policies. On the contrary, the transfer of policy-making powers from the member states to the Union in the last two decades has increased the likelihood of ordinary citizens being confronted with policy consequences that are to be attributed to the EU rather than to their domestic governments. Notable in this respect is the lack of policy prerogatives of the governments of the member states to deal with disasters in the chain of food production. BSE, foot-and-mouth disease, dioxin contamination of poultry, and aviary diseases all served to highlight the dramatic loss of independent policy-making capacity of national governments. But also in the field of (de)regulation of, e.g., energy suppliers, postal services, and telecom, it has become quite visible to large segments of the public that Brussels has become very important. Increasingly, important domestic political actors such as political parties, labor unions, and mass-based interest groups lament that their traditional access to the centers of domestic political power is no longer sufficient to effectively influence policy. Of course, Europe brings not only policies that are seen as problematic by some, it also brings bonuses, in the form of subsidies, removal of previously existing obstacles, and, in general, demonstrably positive economic effects. But here, too, the insulation of the Union from its citizens has its effects by preventing the Union being credited when credit is due.

This transfer of power from the level of national states to the European level has so far been a largely elite-driven process that has not been politicized in most countries until the early 1990s (e.g., van der Eijk and Franklin 1991; see also chapter 10 of this volume). However, there are signs that the process of European integration is becoming increasingly contested (cf. Marks and Steenbergen 2004) and intertwined with (electoral) politics in the member states. This can be seen in referenda about the treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, the outcomes of which were heavily determined by voters’ orientations toward domestic politics (Franklin,
Marsh, and McLaren 1994; Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1995), and in the success of some anti-EU parties in the European elections of 2004. Paradoxically, however, European elections are not the most appropriate forum for popular influence on European integration. Since national states decide about additional transfers of power to the EU, parties in the national parliaments are to be held accountable for furthering integration (Thomassen and Schmitt 1999a). So, there are good reasons to expect that the debate about European integration will not only become more politicized, but that issues related to it will also become more important in national elections.

The relationship between European citizens and their rulers will, in the years after 2004, remain a complex one. The degree of democratic control that electorates can exert over EU policies is extremely limited. Irrespective of its—increasing—legislative importance, the European Parliament is elected in a way that cannot be construed to yield a policy mandate. Moreover, its composition has no clear ramifications for the composition (and hence the political orientation) of the Council or even of the Commission—although this may change somewhat with respect to the latter if some of the proposals generated by the constitutional Convention were to come into effect. Within their own countries, representative democratic procedures give citizens influence over the distribution of legislative power and, to the extent that political parties and their leaders support different policy packages, also indirectly over the policy direction of their national governments. Yet, the independent policy-making capacity of their national governments is increasingly limited as a consequence of transfers of sovereignty to the EU level. This situation has generated a strategic environment for domestic political elites that can be quite detrimental to European integration. Governmental actors may use the EU as an opportunity for claiming credit and for externalizing blame. Mainstream opposition actors may seek short-term (electoral) gain by refraining from supporting their government’s position in EU decision making, even when they would not have taken a different position had they themselves been in power. By doing so, they open up new opportunities to political challengers—political newcomers and non-mainstream opposition actors.

**Research strategy**

In order to investigate the relationship between citizens, domestic politics, and the European Union, we focus on electoral politics. With this choice we certainly do not imply that all politics can be reduced to elections. The study of
elections is, however, of particular relevance in highlighting the complex interactions and relations between citizens and elites in a multi-level political structure. Electoral politics is highly visible and it is direct in its political consequences, whereas other processes by which groups of citizens affect politics are usually less visible and their implications often take effect only after a longer period of time. Moreover, the way in which elections to the European Parliament are conducted guarantees that the major actors in electoral politics, voters and parties, are virtually the same in European and in national elections. Therefore, European elections have a considerable domestic political significance. National elections also affect European Union politics, but only indirectly so: to the extent that national elections determine the composition of the governments of the member states, they also affect the composition of the European Council and the Councils of Ministers. From previous studies we know that the electoral context is a fruitful one to study how domestic and European politics are interrelated. Finally, more than in the context of opinion studies, the electoral context requires voters to decide how important all different kinds of considerations are when confronted with a situation in which only a single choice can be made.

To sketch possible scenarios for future electoral developments, we have to rely on knowledge about the present, or the not too distant past. When our expectations about the plausibility of the occurrence of different scenarios are based upon the most recent data, we have the most confidence in the reliability of these expectations. In view of this, one possible research strategy would be to focus on the most recent national election studies from individual countries. This strategy has several drawbacks, however. In the first place, such studies contain little information about European elections and about voters’ attitudes toward European integration. Moreover, national elections studies are not available for all of the EU member states, and even when they exist, they are conducted at different moments, i.e., in different transnational economic and political circumstances. Finally, differences in the contents and wording of their questionnaires severely limit the potential of national elections studies for cross-national comparative research.

Our strategy is therefore to focus on the European elections of 1999, for which extensive empirical data are available. In almost all chapters of this book, data from the European Elections Study (EES) 1999 are employed—details of this study are provided in appendix A. The EES 1999 consisted of independent cross-sectional surveys fielded in each member state of the EU immediately after the European Parliamentary elections, which ended on 13 June 1999.

The EES survey data are very suitable for cross-national comparative research because the same questions were asked at the same time in each country and in
relation to a common event—the European Parliament elections. The fact that
the study was designed as a study of European elections ensures that appropriate
questions were asked about respondents’ attitudes to European integration and
the EU. Moreover, it provides information about voters’ relations to domestic as
well as to EU politics. An additional advantage of the EES 1999 is that this study
is in many important respects comparable to European Elections Studies of 1994
and 1989. This allows us to compare the findings of 1999 to those reported in pre-
vious works (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

A final advantage of the use of the EES 1999 is that the surveys in the fifteen
member states were interlinked with two additional data sources. The first of
these is a content analysis of the media in the period of the election campaign for
the 1999 EP elections. This media study was conducted in fourteen member
states of the old EU (all countries except Luxembourg). The second study that can
be linked to the voter surveys of the EES is a content analysis of the election
manifestos of all parties that obtained seats in the European Parliament in 1999.
These two data sources provide invaluable information about the campaign mes-
ses that citizens received from media and parties, which in turn can be linked
to citizens’ attitudes to parties and European institutions.

Some of the contributions to this volume can be seen as ‘normal science’, by
which we mean that the analyses are intended to update findings of previous
studies with new data. The results help us not only to confirm the validity of ear-
lier findings, but also to assess to what extent the world has changed. In this
respect the book is a logical ‘supplementary volume’ to the two large-scale and
comparative studies on previous European parliamentary elections that were
mentioned earlier, Choosing Europe? (1996) and Political representation and legiti-
macy in the European Union (1999). The empirical and theoretical knowledge
from these and other previous studies enables us to focus on changes over time,
which would not have been possible had this volume been the first of such studies.
In addition to updating existing knowledge, some contributions incorporate
information from previous European elections in the analyses, thus explicitly
modeling change. Another novel aspect of this book is that we can link data from
media and from party manifestos to survey material (for details see appendices B
and C). This provides a broader perspective on the complex interactions between
media, parties, and citizens than was available in previous work. Of course, the
EES 1999 comprises no data relating to the ten new member states of the 2004
EU enlargement. For these countries we do not have the same kind of information
as for the older member states. This will, of course, change once new data be-
comes available for analysis. New data was collected during the 2004 European
elections, but it will still take a number of years before extensive results thereof can be presented.

One of the aims of this book is to provide a basis for understanding the mutual relationship between electoral politics and European integration by way of assessing plausible scenarios for elections—European and domestic elections—after the 2004 enlargement. These cannot be generated by mere extrapolation of current developments as that would not yield valid insights. Whatever trend-like developments may exist, they cannot be reliably estimated on the basis of only five or six time-points (there have been only five European elections through 1999, only six when 2004 could be included). Moreover, in most respects it is impossible to assume \textit{ceteris paribus} to hold. Since 1979 many of the institutional arrangements defining the EC/EU have changed, and they are likely to continue to change. Voters’, politicians’, and journalists’ experiences, perceptions, and expectations concerning the EU, its institutions, and European elections evolve likewise—thus violating the plausibility of \textit{ceteris paribus} conditions on which over-time comparisons depend.

Our approach to discussing possible scenarios is a different one, therefore. We will use the analyses presented in the first eleven chapters of this book to construct models that allow us to assess how election outcomes would be affected by various kinds of political changes. As we argued above, and as we will elaborate in chapter 12, we expect two important developments to take place in the years to come. The first is that issues with respect to European integration will become more important for voters’ choices: increasing electoral salience of European integration. The second development that we expect to materialize in the next few years is a change in parties’ stands with respect to European integration. For reasons to be discussed in more detail in chapter 12 we expect more parties to advocate Euro-skeptic positions and a greater degree of polarization of these positions. From the results presented in the different chapters of this book we will estimate the electoral consequences of such scenarios.

\textbf{Research questions and plan of the book}

The book begins with a focus on (aggregate) election results. Parties, journalists, and voters alike tend to view European elections as second-order national elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). One of consequences is that fewer people vote in European elections than in national (first-order) ones. Turnout in European elections declined in 1999 for the fourth time in a row, which is seen by many as
threatening the legitimacy of the democratic process. In chapter 1 Mark Franklin analyzes aggregate turnout levels in all EU member states in all European elections since 1979 and explores various structural causes for turnout decline that would not raise such questions about democratic legitimacy. Another consequence of European elections being second-order elections is that party choice may be different from that in a national parliamentary election. Chapter 2 by Marcel van Egmond first assesses the extent to which such differences occur and then continues to assess whether this implies a structural advantage for particular kinds of parties. Chapter 3 by Michael Marsh also focuses on differences in patterns of electoral behavior in European and national elections, which lead to different aggregate outcomes. By comparing the results of European elections with those from the most recent preceding national elections he tests various explanations that have been proposed in the literature to explain these differences.

The second part of this book explores the locations of support for and opposition against European integration. Until the second half of the 1990s, the European project has been mainly elite driven in most European countries. In the 1990s referenda about issues involving the EU were held on several occasions. These referenda increased the political importance of citizens’ opinions about integration, particularly after some referenda failed to provide the necessary consent for governments’ proposals. They also raised the importance of parties’ public stances with respect to European integration. In chapter 4, Andreas Wüst and Hermann Schmitt analyze the positions that parties occupy in this respect by means of the coded content of party manifestos drafted for European elections. They study to what extent parties present a European perspective in their programs for European elections. In addition they map positions of parties on European issues. Finally, they assess how voters’ perceptions of parties relate to the contents of these manifestos. Chapter 5 by Angelika Scheuer and Wouter van der Brug focuses on the same type of questions, but now from the perspective of citizens rather than that of parties. They investigate the social and political location of support for and opposition against the EU in the different member states. The chapter identifies where in society and where in the political spectrum the groups are located that strongly oppose or support the EU and European integration.

The third part of the book focuses on the election campaign. Much of what citizens know about politics in general, about the EU, the elections to the European Parliament, and the campaigns for those elections has been acquired from the mass media. Chapter 6 by Claes de Vreese, Edmund Lauf, and Jochen Peter identifies the main differences among the countries in the tone and visibility of the campaigns for the European elections in the media. They also describe to what
extent the media present the campaign from a European or from a domestic political perspective. Large differences were observed between the different countries, which are partly determined by the absence or presence of a viable anti-EU party. Chapter 7 by Jochen Peter focuses on the effects of campaign contexts on voters’ attitudes toward European integration. He demonstrates that the existence of a viable anti-EU party is an important moderator for the effect of media content. These findings are highly relevant for our discussion of possible future scenarios and the likelihood of increasing or decreasing popular support for the EU.

The fourth part of this book focuses on individual-level voting behavior in European elections. This part consists of two chapters that address the two types of choices voters are confronted with: first, whether or not to vote, and only if so, second, which party to vote for. Chapter 8 by Hermann Schmitt and Cees van der Eijk focuses on the factors that influence whether or not citizens make use of their voting rights. The main question addressed is whether non-voting in European elections is fuelled by opposition to the EU and by (dis)satisfaction with the domestic government. Chapter 9 by Wouter van der Brug, Cees van der Eijk, and Mark Franklin focuses on party choice and attitudes toward European integration. The key question they address is to what extent party choice is motivated by support for or opposition against European integration or EU policies, and to what extent it is motivated by other considerations deriving from the domestic political environment.

In the fifth part we shift our focus to the electoral opportunity structure in which parties and voters find themselves. The electoral opportunity structure of parties depends upon the positions of voters and on the positions of competing parties on important policy dimensions. Positions that are densely populated with voters but not represented by any parties provide opportunities for existing parties to move to those positions, or for new parties to form and position themselves there. The electoral opportunity structure of voters is determined by the choices that parties offer between different sets of policies. Chapter 10 by Cees van der Eijk and Mark Franklin explores parties and voters on two dimensions: left-right and pro- or anti-European integration. After mapping this two-dimensional space, they identify the positions where many voters are located, but which are not represented by parties. Chapter 11 by Martin Kroh, Wouter van der Brug, and Cees van der Eijk focuses on patterns of electoral competition. It charts the groups in the electorates of the member states that have a high propensity of switching between parties, assesses their size, and evaluates the implications for short-term shifts in vote shares that parties may acquire and the conditions under which this may happen.
Chapter 12 is the product of a working conference in which a number of scholars joined forces to reflect on parties’ and citizens’ responses to further European integration. We discuss how future European elections are likely to be affected by domestic political circumstances and how attitudes toward the EU will affect the outcomes of future elections. We argue that the issue of European integration is likely to become more politicized and to become more important for party choice, and we model the consequences thereof in the form of three scenarios. The first scenario is one in which voters’ orientations toward European integration become more important determinants of their votes, but where their own positions and those of parties are unchanged. In a second scenario, positions of parties become more Euro-skeptic, and in the third scenario positions of both parties and voters are changed in such a way that distances between voters and parties on a European integration dimension are given equal play to affect voters’ choices as the left-right dimension, which has until now been the most important domestic political orientation in all of the member states. Obviously, these scenarios are ideal-types, and it is unlikely that future developments will play out exactly in these stylized forms. But we do think that these scenarios contain some of the most important elements of how the relations between voters, member states, and the EU will develop in future years.