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PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2014 European Parliament elections were the first to take place since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and were fundamentally different from those which preceded them. For the first time, a direct link was established between the outcome of the elections and the appointment of the European Commission President. The European political families nominated candidates for President of the European Commission for the first time, and the candidate who was able to command a majority in the newly formed European Parliament became President of the European Commission. The European Council nominated the candidate of the party with most seats in the European Parliament, who was subsequently elected as European Commission President by the European Parliament.

This report reviews the 2014 elections, including measures taken to enhance their transparency, democratic conduct and the European dimension. It assesses citizens' awareness of the elections and the associated rights, action taken by Member States and EU institutions in this respect, and actual turnout. It also looks at the enforcement of EU citizens' electoral rights.

The report is based on recent Eurobarometer and other surveys, information provided by Member States in reply to Commission questionnaires and a Commission-authorized study¹ which collected and analysed qualitative and quantitative data, including through interviews with European political parties, national authorities, media and other stakeholders.

The 2014 elections stemmed the steady fall in overall turnout since the first direct European elections in 1979. These elections have laid the ground for future European elections and established a clear link between the results of the European Parliament elections and the choice of European Commission President. An important precedent has been set for 2019 and beyond, and a European-level forum for political debate has been established.

2. A TRANSPARENT ELECTION PROCESS

2.1. A direct link between the citizens' vote and the election of the Commission President

The Lisbon Treaty established a new constitutional order for the European Union, with the European Parliament being empowered to elect the candidate for President of the European Commission proposed by the European Council, taking into account the results of the European elections. In light of this new situation, on 12 March 2013, the Commission issued a Recommendation on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament.² It called on European political parties to nominate candidates for the position of Commission President, against the background of the Lisbon Treaty, which strengthened the role of the Parliament in relation to the Commission³.

¹ *Study on the Conduct of the 2014 Elections to the European Parliament*, Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES), March 2015.

² Recommendation 2013/142/EU on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament of 12 March 2013 (OJ L 79, 21.3.2013, p. 29). On 27 March 2014, the Commission issued a preliminary report (COM(2014) 196 final) on initiatives taken by stakeholders to implement this Recommendation.

³ Article 17(7) TEU provides for the Parliament to elect the Commission President on the basis of a proposal by the European Council, which must take into account the results of the European elections.

This recommendation aimed at making the link between EU citizens' votes for prospective Members of the European Parliament and their party's candidate for Commission President visible. Furthermore, the Commission encouraged national political parties to use their political broadcasts to promote their lead candidates and their programmes. The Parliament also adopted resolutions on the 2014 elections to this effect.⁴

Five European political parties proposed candidates for the Commission Presidency:

- ✓ the European People's Party (EPP) nominated Jean-Claude Juncker;
- ✓ the Party of European Socialists (PES) nominated Martin Schulz;
- ✓ the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE) nominated Guy Verhofstadt;
- ✓ the European Green Party nominated José Bové and Franziska Keller; and
- ✓ the Party of the European Left nominated Alexis Tsipras.

These parties launched EU-wide election campaigns and held public events across Europe to raise awareness of their candidates and their political programmes for Europe.⁵ The candidates visited 246 cities across the Member States. The following table shows the Member States visited:⁶

Member State	PES	EPP	ALDE	GUE / NGL	Green / EFA
Belgium	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bulgaria	✓	✓			
Czech Republic	✓		✓	✓	✓
Denmark	✓				✓
Germany	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Estonia					
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greece	✓	✓		✓	
Spain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Croatia	✓				✓
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cyprus		✓		✓	
Latvia		✓			
Lithuania					
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓		
Hungary					✓
Malta	✓	✓			
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓		✓
Austria	✓	✓	✓		✓
Poland	✓	✓	✓		✓
Portugal	✓	✓		✓	
Romania	✓		✓		
Slovenia	✓		✓	✓	
Slovakia	✓	✓			
Finland	✓	✓			✓
Sweden	✓		✓		✓
UK	✓		✓		✓
Total	23	18	15	11	16

⁴ Resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 (2012/2829(RSP)); Resolution of 4 July 2013 on improving the practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014 (2013/2102(INI)).

⁵ Jean-Claude Juncker: <http://juncker.epp.eu/my-priorities>;
 Martin Schulz: http://www.pes.eu/martin_schulz_programme_launch_and_campaign_tour;
 Guy Verhofstadt: <http://www.guyverhofstadt.eu/uploads/pdf/Plan%20for%20Europe.pdf>;
 Franziska Keller and José Bové: <http://europeangreens.eu/news/proposals-green-commission-european-alternative-we-greens-fight>;
 Alexis Tsipras: http://alexistsipras.eu/PROGRAMMATIC_DECLARATION_OF_ALEXIS_TSIPRAS.pdf

⁶ CSES study (see footnote 1), Section 3, Table 3.2.

In addition to being mobilised in this way on the ground, the lead candidates took part in ten televised debates in different Member States and different languages,⁷ sharing their vision for the future of Europe and on issues, such as jobs and growth, that particularly matter to voters.⁸

The debates received wide coverage across the EU. In particular, the final debate between the lead candidates on 15 May was broadcast live in 28 countries, aired by at least 152 media outlets (including 55 TV channels and 88 websites) and generated high volumes of social media traffic.⁹

15% of the respondents to a post-election survey¹⁰ covering 15 EU countries said that they had watched at least one of the TV debates.

2.2. A more visible link between national and European political parties

As European political parties are best placed to ‘contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union’,¹¹ the Commission made two recommendations, which were generally welcomed by Member States and European political parties,¹² to make the links between the political families at European and national level more visible:¹³

- (i) **Member States** should encourage and facilitate in their electoral system, the provision of information on affiliations between national and European political parties, including by allowing these to be indicated on ballot papers; and
- (ii) **national political parties** should make their affiliation to European political parties publicly known ahead of the elections and display it prominently in all campaign material, communications and political broadcasts.

As regards the first recommendation (i), 16 Member States¹⁴ indicated that they had taken measures **to inform national political parties** of the recommendation that they should make their affiliation to European political parties publicly known. This mainly involved the authorities communicating the Commission’s Recommendation to the political parties. In some cases, more intensive efforts were made. In Greece, national authorities organised a

⁷ These were held in April and May in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and France. Five were head-to-head debates between the representatives of the two leading European political parties and four were open to all lead candidates. A further debate was held between the leader of the European Green Party and the lead candidate of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

⁸ European Parliament, *2014 post-election survey*, p. 9; see: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2014/post/post_2014_survey_analitical_overview_en.pdf

⁹ A total of 112 595 tweets were posted using #TellEUROPE: <http://www3.ebu.ch/contents/news/2014/05/ebu-makes-history-with-the-eurov.html>.

¹⁰ <http://www.aecr.eu/media/AECRAMR-European-election-poll.pdf> (p. 10).

¹¹ Article 10(4) TEU and Article 12(2) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

¹² Commission preliminary report (see footnote 2), p. 2.

¹³ The Commission also proposed new rules aimed at increasing the visibility and EU-wide recognition of European political parties. On the basis of this proposal, the Parliament and the Council adopted Regulation (EU) No 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 1).

¹⁴ In response to the Commission’s questionnaires: Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom; see CSES study (see footnote 1), Section 3, Table 3.1.

meeting in the national parliament to inform parties of the Recommendation. In Italy and Finland, guidelines were issued to make national parties aware of the Recommendation and encourage them to follow it.

Nine Member States allowed national parties to **indicate their affiliation** to European parties on **ballot papers**, by introducing laws¹⁵ (if such a law was not already in place¹⁶) allowing the European party's name or logo to be included on the ballot paper.

Six Member States¹⁷ indicated that they did not take any such action, either because they considered that providing information to the electorate was a matter for the political parties or because action by the authorities would constitute interference prohibited by their electoral law.

As regards the second recommendation **(ii), national political parties** took various measures to publicise their affiliation to European political parties. The overall picture emerging from research¹⁸ involving a sample of the over 500 national parties affiliated to European parties is as follows:

- Most of the national parties in the sample made their affiliation visible *in a limited way only*, i.e. essentially in their printed election material.¹⁹ This meant that the affiliation was more visible for better informed citizens than for the general public;
- The research identified only a small number of parties that took comprehensive action, by mentioning their affiliation to European parties both in written material, such as manifestos, posters, websites and social media, and in speeches, TV debates and campaigning events;²⁰

¹⁵ Greece and Slovenia.

¹⁶ Laws were already in place in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK.

¹⁷ In response to the Commission's questionnaires: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Croatia, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia.

¹⁸ CSES study (see footnote 1). The sample covered the two political parties from each Member State with the most seats in the European Parliament. In most cases, these were also the majority parties in the respective Member States. However, as this was not the case everywhere, some smaller parties were included in the sample to help ensure representative coverage at national level.

¹⁹ For instance, in Germany, both the majority parties, i.e. the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) and the Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*), and smaller parties revealed their affiliation with European parties only in their manifestos and, in some cases, in TV debates and campaigning events, but not on campaign billboards. In the Czech Republic, all three parties analysed, i.e. the Czech Social Democratic Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická*), ANO 2011 and TOP09, made only limited efforts to promote their affiliation. In Hungary, the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*) made some references to their European party in public debates but not in general campaign material, while the Hungarian Civic Alliance (*Fidesz — Magyar Polgári Szövetség*) mentioned their affiliation at events and in public debates but no clear connection was evident in printed material or on posters. In Denmark, *Venstre*, the Social Democrats and the Danish People's Party mainly mentioned their affiliation in their manifestos. In Malta, the Nationalist and Labour parties mentioned their affiliations with European parties only in some election literature.

²⁰ Examples identified were the main national parties in Latvia, several parties (including one of the ruling coalition parties) in Greece, the People's Party (*Partido Popular*) in Spain, the Democratic Alliance (*Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός*) in Cyprus, the Left-wing Bloc (*Bloco de Esquerda*) in Portugal, the main parties in Luxembourg and three of the 19 parties in the Netherlands..

- The research also identified that a few parties *did not publicise* affiliation to a European political party, either because they had yet to decide whether to affiliate or because they had decided not to.²¹

The recommendation that affiliation to European parties be displayed on ballot papers was followed only exceptionally, even in the Member States where this was possible.²²

3. INCREASED FOCUS ON EU ISSUES

Both the Commission and the Parliament took measures before and during the electoral campaign to raise citizens' awareness of how the elections would impact their lives. Efforts were made to highlight the relevance of EU issues, which could otherwise have been overshadowed by national and local topics in the debates in the Member States. The percentage of EU citizens who said they had all the information they needed to vote increased slightly compared to the outcome in 2009 (57%, as compared with 53% in 2009).²³

3.1. Citizens' Dialogues

In the course of 2013 and 2014, Members of the Commission, together with local or national politicians and Members of the European Parliament, held 51 town hall-style public dialogues with citizens throughout Europe about their expectations for the future of Europe and what is needed to strengthen the democratic structures of the Union.

The Citizens' Dialogues highlighted the European dimension of local problems and the local dimension of European policy issues, and how the European elections influence the daily lives of citizens. 87% of the participants said they would vote in the European elections.²⁴

3.2. Commission funding

The Commission made use of the funding tools at its disposal to support civil society and town-twinning projects aimed at promoting the democratic participation of EU citizens. The Europe for Citizens Programme and the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship programme funded several projects raising awareness and seeking to empower citizens as regards their participation in the democratic life of the EU.

3.3. The European Parliament's awareness-raising campaign

On 11 September 2013, the European Parliament launched an information campaign entitled *Act. React. Impact*. One of the main aims was to generate an EU-focused debate on issues of EU-wide relevance, such as the economy, jobs, quality of life and the EU's role in the world.²⁵

²¹ Examples were the Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik*) in Hungary, the 5-star Movement (*Movimento 5 stelle*) in Italy and the UK Independence Party in the United Kingdom.

²² Only some parties in France, one coalition party in Greece, four in Italy and three in the Netherlands made use of this right. In Belgium, Austria, Cyprus and Spain, no party mentioned affiliation with a European political party on the ballot paper.

²³ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), p.75.

²⁴ Commission report on *Citizens' Dialogues as a Contribution to Developing a European Public Space*, 24 March 2014, (COM(2014) 173 final), p. 13; see: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2014/EN/1-2014-173-EN-F1-1.Pdf>.

²⁵ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20130906IPR18827/html/European-Parliament-launches-information-campaign-towards-2014-elections>.

This campaign had a significant impact in the media.²⁶ The Parliament website dedicated to the elections was visited 7.1 million times between December 2013 and May 2014. A European elections video was produced in 34 languages and broadcast over 7 400 times on 173 TV channels. There were 11 million online views. Roughly one in five European voters was reached via Facebook. The 'I voted' message on Facebook was shared more than 2.7 million times and seen by nearly 90 million people.

In addition, the Parliament organised ReACT conferences²⁷ in Paris, Frankfurt, Warsaw, Rome and Madrid with the participation of citizens, experts and European politicians. During these events, EU citizens could share their views on the main issues raised in the campaign.

3.4. Common voting day

In order to heighten voters' sense of being involved in a common European endeavour, the Commission had encouraged Member States to agree on a common voting day for the European elections, with polling stations closing at the same time.

In this respect, there was no change as compared with the previous elections. In 21 Member States, the elections were held on 25 May and in seven²⁸ they took place between 22 and 24 May. All Member States announced their results around the same time, during the evening of 25 May, when ballots had closed across Europe.

4. PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS

4.1. General turnout

Since the first direct elections in 1979, turnout in European elections had fallen steadily from 61.99% in 1979 to 42.97% in 2009. However, overall participation in the 2014 elections was only marginally lower than in 2009, dropping by 0.36% (to 42.61%), as compared with steeper drops of 2.5% between 2004 and 2009 and 4% between 1999 and 2004. Thus, the downward trend was significantly stemmed. For comparison, the turnout in the presidential elections in the United States was 57.1% in 2008 and 54.9% in 2012.

The following table shows overall EU turnout in successive European elections:²⁹

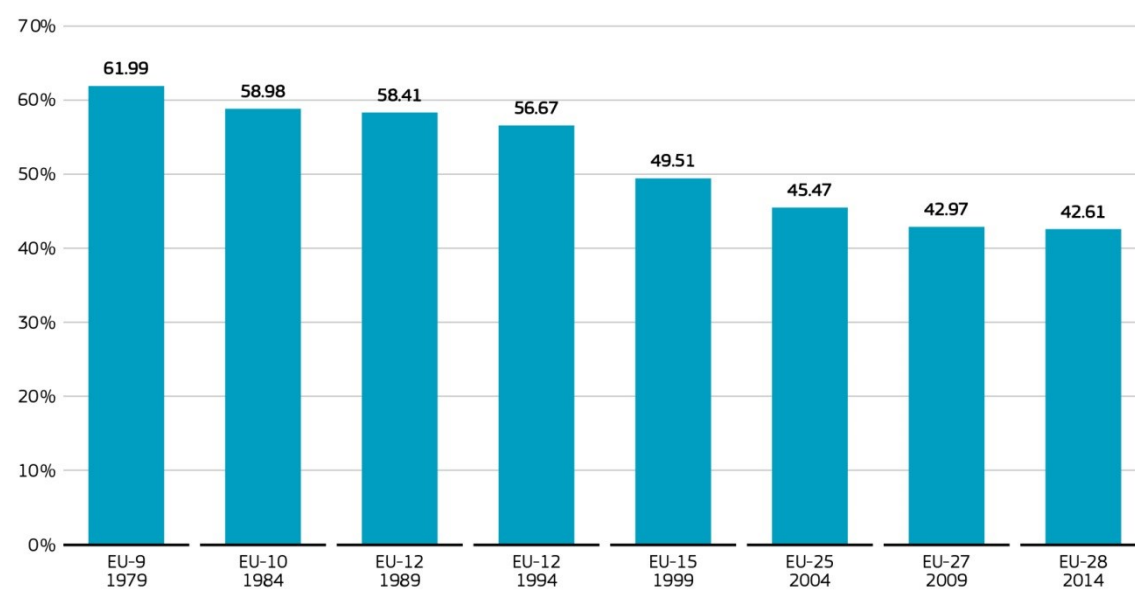
²⁶ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140603sto48801/html/How-social-media-enabled-people-to-be-a-part-of-the-European-elections>.

²⁷ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140123STO33618/html/ReACT-Rome-improving-the-quality-of-life-in-Europe>; <http://audiovisual.europarl.europa.eu/Page.aspx?id=1119>.

²⁸ The Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia and the UK. These countries do not hold elections on Sundays.

²⁹ Source: TNS/Scytl in cooperation with the European Parliament; *European and national elections figured out*, European Parliament Review (special 2014 European elections edition), November 2014, p. 41; see: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/elections_results/review.pdf.

Figure 1: Turnout in the European elections 1979 - 2014

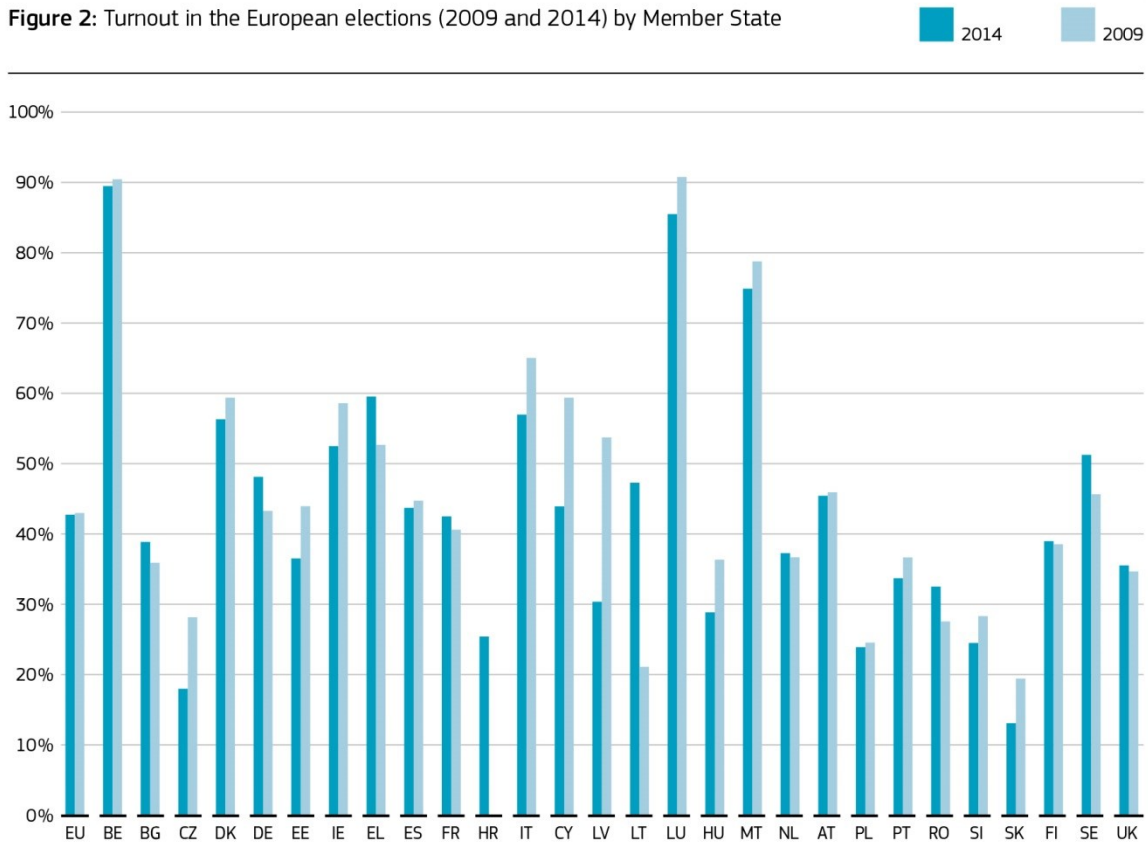


Turnout varied significantly across the 28 Member States. It was as high as 89.64% in Belgium, 59.97% in Greece (voting is mandatory in both) and 57.22% in Italy, but considerably lower in other countries, such as the Czech Republic (18.20%) and Slovakia (13.05%).

The following table shows voter turnout for the European elections in 2009 and 2014 in the EU and by Member State:³⁰

³⁰ Based on figures in the EP Review 2014 (see footnote 30), p. 49.

Figure 2: Turnout in the European elections (2009 and 2014) by Member State



Turnout was higher among men than women (45% and 41% respectively),³¹ with the gap widening slightly as compared with 2009 (44% against 42%).³²

Younger people were the largest group of abstainers: only 27.8% of 18-24 year-olds voted, as compared with 51.3% in the 55+ age-group.³³

The table below compares the percentages of young people (aged 18-24) who voted in each Member State:³⁴

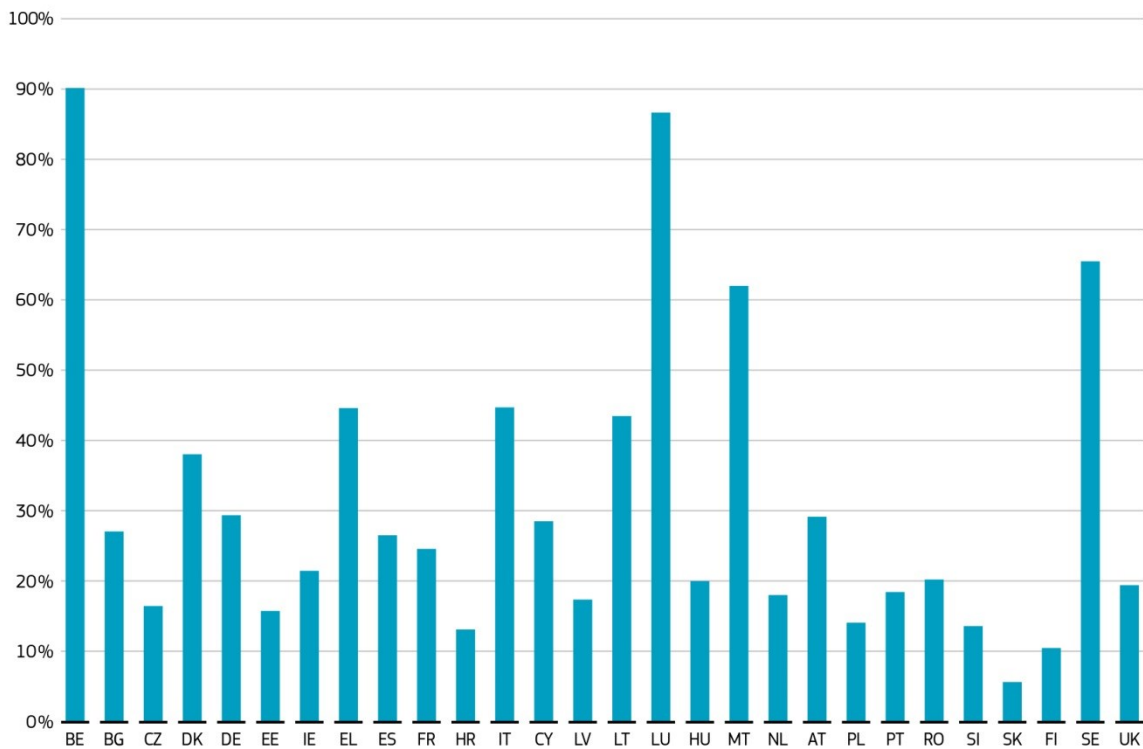
³¹ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), socio-demographic annex, p. 11.

³² European Parliament, *2009 post-election survey – first results: European average and major national trends*, p.2; see: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/28_07/FR_EN.pdf.

³³ For comparison, according to a 2013 public survey (Flash Eurobarometer 375, *European Youth: Participation in Democratic Life*, p. 11; see: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/flash375_en.pdf), 73% of young voters had voted in the previous three years in an election other than for the European Parliament (i.e. local, regional or national).

³⁴ Based on figures in the EP Review 2014 (see footnote 29), p. 43.

Figure 3: Percentage of young people (aged 18-24) who voted in each Member State



A report assessing the Erasmus project found a strong correlation between experience of studying abroad and voting behaviour in the 2014 European elections: Erasmus alumni were more likely to vote – 81 % of those responding said they had done so.³⁵

Respondents to the Parliament’s post-election survey said that the main reason they voted was that they always vote (41 %), their ‘duty as a citizen’ (41 %) or ‘to support a political party to which I feel close’ (22%). The three following factors were also mentioned: ‘I am in favour of the EU’ (14%), ‘I feel European (13%) and ‘I can make things change by voting in the European elections’ (12%). 5% indicated that they voted to influence the choice of Commission President.³⁶

As regards reasons for not voting, the most popular answers were ‘lack of trust in politics in general’ (23%), ‘not interested in politics’ (19%) and ‘my vote has no consequences’ (14%). 7% cited the fact that they ‘do not know much about the EU or the European Parliament or the European Parliament elections’. The percentage of abstainers referring to both types of reason, i.e. the perception that voting does not change anything and lack of knowledge about

³⁵ *Erasmus Voting Assessment Project*, Generation Europe Foundation, Brussels, 2014; see: <http://erasmusvoting.eu/news/press-release-erasmus-studying-abroad-increases-political-participation-young-people>.

³⁶ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), analytical overview, p. 25.

the EU or the European elections, fell in comparison with the previous elections.³⁷ Also, the number of citizens who abstained due to a lack of public debate or electoral campaigning was halved.³⁸ The ultimate decision as to whether to vote or abstain traditionally depends on a whole range of factors, some of which are personal and unrelated to the quality of the campaign or perceptions of the European elections.³⁹

In countries where the European elections took place at the same time as other national or nationwide elections (Belgium, Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta and the United Kingdom), voter turnout was higher than elsewhere,⁴⁰ but the political debate tended to be dominated by national topics. In Lithuania, the European elections were held on the same day as the presidential elections and turnout rose to 47%, from only 21% in 2009.⁴¹

4.2. Participation of EU citizens residing in another Member State than their own

EU citizens who live in another Member State than their own (mobile EU citizens) have the right to vote and stand as candidates in European elections in the host Member State under the same conditions as that State's nationals. This right, enshrined in Article 22 TFEU and Article 39 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, is given concrete effect in Directive 93/109/EC.⁴²

A relatively low number of mobile EU citizens made use of their right to vote in their Member State of residence.⁴³ The rates of their participation may be influenced by the fact that they have to choose whether to vote in their Member State of origin or in the Member State to which they have moved (i.e. for different sets of candidates). A 2012 Eurobarometer survey showed that people are divided on the candidates and lists they prefer to vote for in European elections. About 48% said that, if living in a Member State other than their own, they would

³⁷ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), analytical overview, p. 35: 14% (as compared with 17% in 2009) said that they felt that their vote did not have any consequences or change anything. 7% (against 10% in 2009) said that they did not know much about the EP or the EP elections.

³⁸ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), analytical overview, p.35: 3% of abstainers stated this as a reason for not voting, as compared with 6% of abstainers in 2009.

³⁹ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), analytical overview, p. 35: 13% of abstainers said they were too busy, had no time or were working, 7% were ill, 6% were involved in a family or leisure activity and another 7% mentioned other reasons.

⁴⁰ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), analytical overview, p. 3.

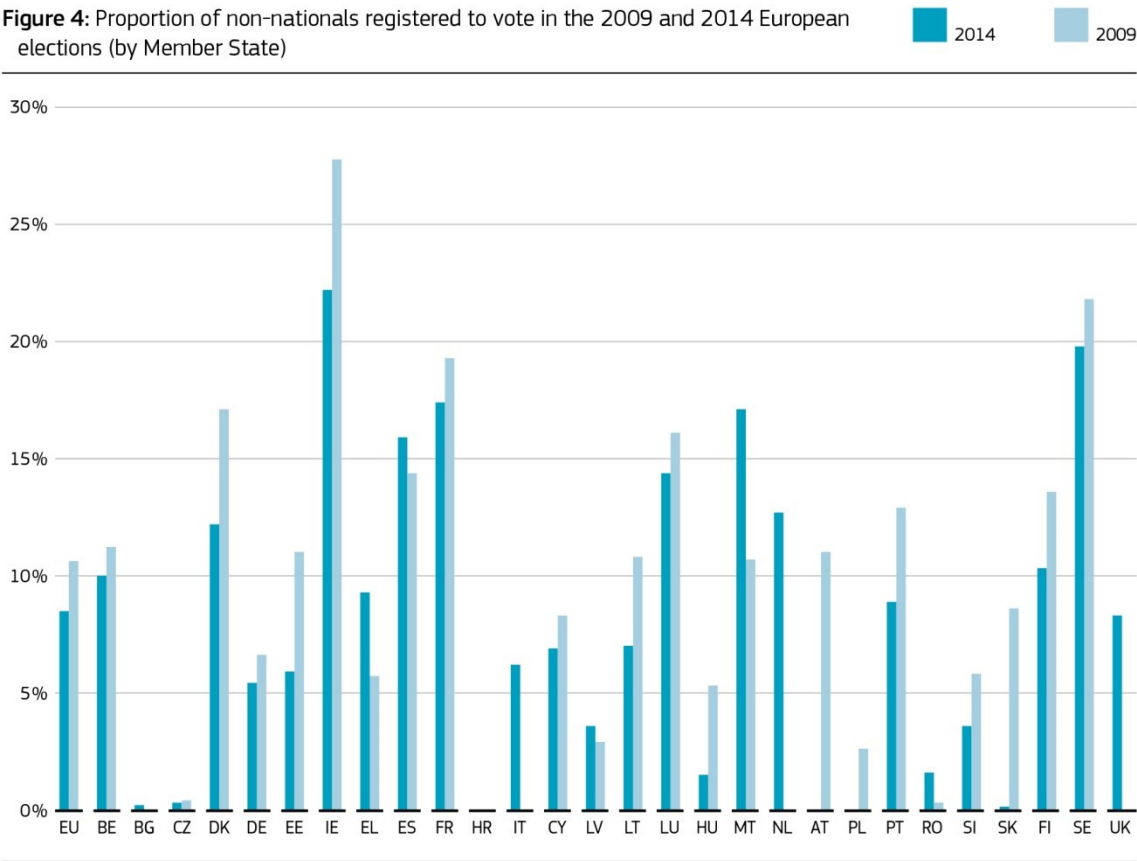
⁴¹ EP post-election survey (see footnote 8), analytical overview, p. 20.

⁴² Council Directive 93/109/EC of 6 December 1993 laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the EP for citizens of the Union residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (OJ L 329, 30.12.1993, p. 34). This Directive was amended by Directive 2013/1/EU, which aimed at facilitating the exercise by mobile EU citizens of their right to stand as candidates in elections to the EP.

⁴³ Of all non-Czech EU citizens of voting age resident in the Czech Republic, only 0.4% registered to vote (682 out of 164 644). The mobile EU citizens' registration rate was also low in Hungary – 1.5% (1 605 out of 104 822), Germany – 5.4% (172 110 out of 3 168 638) and Cyprus – 6.9% (7 712 out of 112 012). On the other hand, mobile EU citizens registered in comparatively high numbers in Ireland – 22.2% (71 735 out of 323 460), France – 17.4% (245 063 out of 1 199 818), Malta – 17.1% (7 868 out of 45 917) and Sweden – 19.8% (49 092 out of 247 426).

prefer to vote there, while 42% would still prefer to exercise their right to vote in their home country.⁴⁴

The following table outlines the proportion of non-nationals (who are mobile EU citizens) registered to vote in the European elections in 2009 and 2014 in the EU and by Member State:⁴⁵



While still low, the number of mobile EU citizens who stood as candidates in their Member State of residence more than doubled, from 81 in 2009 to 170 in 2014.⁴⁶ This could be attributed to the new simplified procedures introduced by Directive 2013/1/EU, which means that candidates no longer have to provide proof that they have not been deprived of their electoral rights in their home Member State, but only have to make a declaration to that effect, to be verified by the authorities in the host Member State.

4.3. Awareness and engagement of EU citizens

Member States took various approaches to their awareness-raising campaigns: some carried out general campaigns, covering the whole electorate, while others also specifically targeted EU citizens from other Member States residing in their territory.

⁴⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 364, *Electoral rights*, March 2013; see: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_364_en.pdf, p.34

⁴⁵ Based on figures in the CSES study (see footnote 1), Section 5, Table 5.6.

⁴⁶ CSES study (see footnote 1), Section 5, Table 5.8.

Increasing participation by non-national EU voters – examples of best practice

- **Individual letters** to non-national EU citizens of voting age, with explanations on the exercise of their voting rights and the registration form, were sent in several EU languages in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden.
- In Greece, a **special application** was set up on a ministry's website whereby non-national EU citizens could find their entry in the special electoral rolls and the polling station where they could vote.

Civil society organisations were actively involved in efforts to mobilise voters, e.g. they informed citizens about the importance and benefit of participating in the European elections they made e-tools available to help voters select a candidate matching their preferences⁴⁷ or worked towards more inclusive policies to ensure access for persons with disabilities.⁴⁸

Examples of NGO projects funded by the Programme Europe for Citizens

Enabling EU citizens to reflect on, discuss, exchange on European issues, including with candidates, and make an informed choice in the elections:

- JoiEU: Joint Citizen Action for a Stronger, Citizen-friendly Union (European Citizen Action service - ECAS).
- The 2014 Transeuropa Caravans: transnational citizens' engagement with the European Parliament elections (European Alternatives)
- Encouraging Young Europeans to Vote Out the EU Democratic Deficit (International Management Institute).

With specific regard to mobile EU citizens, several NGOs carried out campaigns to mobilise them and generally raise their awareness of their electoral rights. Other projects focused on encouraging women across the EU to vote and stand as candidates in the European elections⁴⁹.

Examples of NGO projects funded by the Programme on Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Campaigns encouraging participation by mobile EU citizens:

Action taken included work with associations, awareness-raising projects, the development of training tools and support in completing voting formalities.

- 'Operation Vote' (*Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo dei paesi – COSPE*);

⁴⁷ e.g. the European Youth Forum — League of Young Voters' online information platform; the *VoteWatch* e-tool; the European University Institute's *euandi* voting profiler; the *WeCitizens* voting profiler.

⁴⁸ e.g. the European Disability Forum sought to identify obstacles that people with disabilities face in exercising their electoral rights. Such as, for instance, the European campaign for parity democracy and active European citizenship: 'no modern European democracy without gender equality!' by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies.

⁴⁹ Such as, for instance, the European campaign for parity democracy and active European citizenship: 'no modern European democracy without gender equality!' by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies.

- ‘Access to rights & civil dialogue for ALL’ (*Pour la Solidarité*);
- ‘All citizens now’ (University of Chieti-Pescara).

Politicians and voters were able to interact directly, thanks to the increased social media activity around the elections, the lead candidates and their programmes. An analysis of the #EP2014 and #EU14 digital campaigns tracked around three million tweets about the elections.⁵⁰ Over a million were sent in the week of the election itself.⁵¹ The increased use of social media provided candidates with an additional means of reaching out to citizens and gave voters more of an opportunity to engage actively in the debate, rather than just casting their vote.

5. EU CITIZENS’ EXERCISE OF THEIR ELECTORAL RIGHTS AND RESPECT OF COMMON PRINCIPLES

5.1 Safeguarding the electoral rights of EU citizens residing in a Member State other than their own

The right of mobile EU citizens to vote and stand as candidates in their Member State of residence

The Commission carried out a comprehensive exercise ahead of the elections to ensure correct and full transposition and application of Directive 93/109/EC so as to eliminate possible obstacles to EU citizens’ exercise of their right to vote and, in particular, to ensure that national laws imposed no additional requirements on EU citizens from other Member States. By May 2014, all transposition issues that the Commission had identified before the elections⁵² were successfully addressed and national legislation amended where necessary.

The Commission has since been in dialogue with the UK authorities on a number of issues reported by EU citizens residing in the UK who wanted to register to vote there.⁵³ On 14 November 2014, the House of Commons published a report⁵⁴ that took note of the UK Electoral Commission’s position regarding specific barriers that EU citizens faced in participating in the elections. The report recommended simplifying the system and running a campaign to inform EU citizens of the relevant registration conditions and arrangements.

Almost all issues relating to the *late transposition* of Directive 2013/1/EU on the exercise of mobile EU citizens’ right to stand as candidates were successfully resolved before the elections.⁵⁵ The Commission is pursuing bilateral dialogues with certain Member States⁵⁶ on a number of issues of *incorrect or incomplete transposition* of the Directive.

⁵⁰ *Social media and the elections — did it have an impact?*, Marek Zaremba-Pike, 2014; see: <http://europedecides.eu/2014/06/social-media-and-the-elections-did-it-have-an-impact>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *On progress towards effective EU Citizenship 2011-2013*, report under Article 25 TFEU (COM(2013) 270).

⁵³ The Commission’s attention was drawn to instances of the electoral authorities failing to send the separate registration form or to process the form, although it had been properly filled in and submitted.

⁵⁴ UK House of Commons, *Voter engagement in the UK*, Fourth Report of Session 2014–15; see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmpolcon/232/232.pdf>.

⁵⁵ In one case (Czech Republic), the Commission issued a reasoned opinion. In all other cases, the Member States concerned notified the Commission of transposition measures following receipt of the letter of formal notice.

The right to found or become members of political parties

A dialogue took place with 11 Member States that did not allow non-national EU citizens to found or become members of political parties so that they could participate in elections under the same conditions as nationals of their Member State of residence.

A solution was found in five cases: in two cases national law was amended⁵⁷ and in the other three the situation was clarified.⁵⁸ Three other Member States announced future legislative change.⁵⁹ The Commission took action in the three remaining cases.⁶⁰

5.2. Ensuring respect for the common principles of the European Parliament elections

When organising European elections, Member States must respect certain common principles enshrined in EU law:⁶¹

- **European Parliament elections are to be free, secret and by direct universal suffrage⁶²**

In order to safeguard a core element of the principle of free suffrage, EU law prohibits the publication of results in any Member State until voting has closed in all.⁶³ This is so that those who have yet to vote are not influenced by results in other Member States. The Commission successfully addressed this issue with Member States before the elections to ensure EU-wide compliance with this principle.

- **No-one may vote more than once in the same election⁶⁴**

(i) The case of mobile EU citizens

In order to prevent mobile EU citizens from voting both in their Member State of residence and their Member State of origin, those who register to vote in the former have their names deleted from the electoral rolls in the latter.

Directive 93/109/EC establishes a mechanism for exchanging EU voter data for this purpose. To address difficulties linked to the operation of the mechanism, notably the heavy administrative burden on national administrations, the Commission recommended a number of measures, including setting up a single contact authority in each Member State for notifying EU voters' personal data and the use of common IT tools for transmitting the data.

The vast majority of Member States welcomed the recommendations and reported that the measures had a significant positive impact in terms of cutting red tape as a result of

⁵⁶ Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Slovenia.

⁵⁷ Bulgaria and Finland.

⁵⁸ Germany, Greece and Malta.

⁵⁹ Lithuania, Slovakia and Spain.

⁶⁰ The Czech Republic, Latvia and Poland.

⁶¹ The '1976 Act' on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, which is annexed to Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom of 20 September 1976 and was last amended by Council Decision 2002/772/EC, Euratom (OJ L 283, 21.10.2002, p. 1).

⁶² Article 1(3) of the '1976 Act'.

⁶³ Article 10 of the '1976 Act'.

⁶⁴ Article 9 of the '1976 Act'; Article 4 of Directive 93/109/EC.

voter data, in most cases, no longer being received from several decentralised electoral bodies. A few Member States⁶⁵ suggested that the lack of harmonised electoral calendars and methods for identifying voters meant that the mechanism was not as efficient as it could be. One Member State considered the mechanism to be disproportionate given the scale of the double-voting problem. The Commission will continue, together with the Member States, to explore ways of further improving the efficiency of the mechanisms preventing double voting.

(ii) EU citizens with multiple nationalities

There was broad media coverage of the case of a German citizen who also held the nationality of another Member State and was able to vote twice.

While no one may vote more than once in any election of members of the European Parliament⁶⁶, the Directive 93/109/EC mechanism for preventing double voting, by its nature, cannot be applied to dual or multiple nationals. As Member States usually do not know which of their nationals also have the nationality of another Member State, dual nationals can register in two Member States. That said, all Member States have in place sanctions against double voting. The incident in question shows the need for Member States to make people more aware of the ban on double voting and the applicable sanctions.

6. CONCLUSION

The key new element in the 2014 European elections was the direct link between the European Parliament election results and the choice of European Commission President, as provided for in the Lisbon Treaty. This direct link meant that candidates for President of the European Commission ("lead candidates") with different political programmes were nominated by European political parties and took part in a pan-European election campaign.

Under this new system, voters could more easily make the link between a vote cast for a national party and the impact of this vote on the political direction of the European Union for the next five years. This allowed voters to make an informed choice between alternative political platforms for Europe, rather than on exclusively national political issues. It injected a greater element of information and choice into the election, reinforced the democratic legitimacy of the European Commission, and has the potential to enhance public interest and strengthen accountability in the future.

The lead candidates participated in EU-wide political events and debates with broad media coverage that were geared to familiarising citizens with European issues that have a direct impact on their lives, thus 'europeanising' the elections.

The use of interactive social media as campaigning tools made it easier than before for voters to engage directly in the campaign. The social media campaigns of the different political parties reached hundreds of millions of European citizens.

Directive 2013/1/EU ensured that mobile EU citizens could exercise their political rights more effectively with a reduced administrative burden on national authorities. As guardian of the Treaties, the Commission has an enforcement role in safeguarding EU mobile citizens'

⁶⁵ e.g. Austria, Cyprus, Slovenia and Portugal.

⁶⁶ Article 9 of the '1976 Act'

right to vote and stand as candidates in European and promoting exchanges of best practice facilitating the exercise of this right.

There is a need to act not only shortly before the start of the election campaign but also far in advance; this implies the need for a reflection on how to maintain an ongoing interest in EU politics and increase awareness of the direct impact of European elections on citizens' lives.

Looking ahead to the 2019 elections, it is important to identify ways of further enhancing the European dimension and the democratic legitimacy of the EU decision-making process, and to examine further, and seek to address, the reasons for the persistently low turnout in some Member States.

This points to a need to identify further ways in which to foster participation in the next elections, in particular through timely support for national, regional and local awareness-raising campaigns.

A dialogue with all stakeholders would be one way to take full advantage of the new features of the elections introduced in 2014, e.g. building on the concept of lead candidates to promote political accountability.

One factor in improving political accountability is highlighting the affiliations between national and European parties. This could be pursued in discussions with the Member States, political parties and the European Parliament.

Citizens' Dialogues and the participation of citizens in European parties' campaign events and online discussions show that there is strong demand among citizens for more interaction with EU, national and local politicians on issues that matter to them. This form of exchange has real potential to become a lasting European project, as illustrated by the fact that, in several Member States, it led to the creation of informal networks and initiatives that keep the debate alive. Supporting Citizens' Dialogues further can be a means of encouraging citizens to play a more active role in European politics throughout the Commission's mandate. Fostering a Europe-wide debate and building on the new elements of the 2014 elections can be seen as squarely in line with President Juncker's emphasis on a Union of Democratic Change in the Political Guidelines.