

It is important to dispel the myths and wrong theories about last week's European elections and learn the right lessons from them, says **Alina Mungiu Pippidi**

# EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

## Why these results



**Why did Europe go right?**

**Why did so many Europeans refrain from voting?**

**Are the new Europeans worse Europeans, because they do not vote for the European Parliament?**

**Is this another step towards more democratic deficit and therefore towards the end of EU?**

### **1. Why did Europe go right?**

The causes of EU going right have nothing to do with the EU, but with EU member countries. The EU elections are like a European soccer championship played in each national league with aggregated EU results. The explanation of the results of the vote from June 4-7 cannot be but an aggregate of 27 different explanations from 27 national frameworks, not a single explanation, like the end of capitalism or the EU democratic deficit.

British Labor lost due to its domestic deficit of accountability and performance. Sarkozy won due

to the extraordinary fragmentation of his opponents: the French left parties together won more votes than UMP. Hungarian opposition was bound to win for some time due to pure domestic causes. Struggling to find a unique EU explanation is not only simplifying, but clearly misleading.

## **2. Why did so many Europeans refrain from voting?**

The turnout was not dramatically low. While it will be used by Euroskeptics to claim that EU's institutions lack legitimacy, the turnout was just 2% below last time – within the statistical error margin of any SOFRES poll. Explaining 2% is a loss of time – more sun in the voting day is enough to account for it.

## **3. Are the new Europeans worse Europeans, just because they do not vote for the European Parliament?**

One of the strongest determinants of the vote in new democracies is subjective competence. I vote if I feel I know enough about candidates and platforms, so I can have some form of political preference.

The low turnout in new member countries results from two factors. The first is low subjective competence: people feel that they do not know what these elections are about and how they affect them, so they find more convenient to refrain from voting.

The second factor is the disenchantment with national political elites, which can be punished with no direct consequences on EU elections better than in national elections (where, for instance, former

Communists might win following abstention and run the country). As proof, any survey shows that EU Parliament is far more trusted in new member countries than national Parliaments, seen as corrupt.

The countries with the lowest turnout, like Slovakia or Romania, are the countries where constituents are the most upset with their domestic political elites and want to send a signal. New EU members refrain from vote from totally different reasons than Euroskepticism.

## **4. Is this another step towards more democratic deficit and therefore towards the end of EU?**

We have to remove EU from the quantitative balance where we weight it all the time as 'more' or 'less' EU and to de-dramatize the results. EU has to learn to cope with dramatic change matching our times. A different EU is not a worse EU. The 'more or less' emerges when matching against a past vision, in a world which changes dramatically. While people who think in these terms are dedicated Europeans, they are also EU's worst saboteurs.

Yes, we now have David Cameron and his people form an anti-Lisbon group. But also the Eurosceptic Independence-Democracy group, which previously had 24 members, lost seats and has now 15-19 MEPs.

In the end, if EU will not go ahead the Lisbon way, it will go ahead in other, different ways. First thing is first: let's stop sending ourselves signals to the rest of the world that we will disintegrate if the Lisbon treaty will not pass. We will not. We managed the Georgian crisis

very well without the Lisbon treaty. We would not have managed the financial crisis better with it adopted. Indeed the most pressing pan-EU institution we need, a stronger regulator of international banks acting in legal twilight areas is not included in the treaty, as nobody foresaw an international crisis a year ago. A strong EU is one which adjusts fast, not mourns its old plans and throws good time after bad one.

Fast adjustment and leadership in harsh times come from nationally elected leaders, so from the Council – so it is in no way affected by any results for the European Parliament.

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