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EUSA Review Forum

The European Parliament: Taking Stock after the June 2004 Elections

ON JUNE 10-13, 2004, voters in the 25 member states elected a new European Parliament (EP). Five days later, governments agreed on a Constitution for the EU that reinforces the legislative role of the EP in numerous areas. This is a unique occasion to reflect on the evolution of dynamics within the European Parliament and on its relations with other EU institutions. This Forum gathers four recognized experts on the EP and European elections to take stock of changes and continuities in the practices of members of the EP. First, Niilo Kauppi analyzes the key features on the 2004 election campaigns, underscoring previous patterns: low turnout in elections instrumentalized as mid-term elections for the parties in government and the use of celebrities to gather the vote. Next, Michael Shackleton revisits the last five years to underline the evolution of the role of the EP in the institutional triangle with the Commission and Council. Its increased working relationship with the Council spurred by the co-decision procedure has the potential to leave the Commission less influential on shaping policy output. Olivier Costa focuses on the party dynamics within the EP during the last mandate. While confirming that voting patterns have not changed drastically, he observes some changes in coalitions. Finally, Simon Hix looks towards the future. In his view, although the June results have not significantly altered the partisan composition of the EP and the strength of the main parties, he points to the broader picture; a Center-Right Parliament working with a Council dominated by Center-Right governments and potentially a Commission with many Center-Left representatives. The overall Right-wing partisan balance of three major EU institutions may generate decisions reflecting an ideological standpoint much clearer to read and comprehend for the European voters in the 2009 elections.

-Virginie Guiraudon, EUSA Forum Editor

'Europe': A Side Issue in European Parliamentary Election Campaigns

Niilo Kauppi

IT IS A PARADOX, but while the powers of the European Parliament have increased substantially since the first direct elections in 1979, electoral participation has plummeted - from 63 per cent in 1979, to 48.4 per cent in 1999, and 45.3 per cent today. The reasons for this

high level of abstention are well known: the political stakes are low, there is a public lack of knowledge about the issues, and a distrust of 'faceless' Brussels bureaucrats. It is no surprise that in 2004, party campaigns chose to 'remedy' the situation by concentrating on domestic issues and promoting celebrity candidates in almost all member states.

Although all member states use proportional voting in European elections, national variations in the size of the electoral district and the types of proportional systems used shape candidates' political campaigns. In the 2004 twenty-five separate elections for the European Parliament, voters chose between over 14,600 candidates vying for 732 seats. The British and Dutch voted first (June 10), followed by the Irish (June 11), the Czechs (June 11 and 12), the Latvians and Maltese (June 12), and the Italians (June 12 and 13). The remaining eighteen member states cast their votes on June 13. In Germany, Italy and the UK, European elections coincided with local elections, in Lithuania with presidential elections, in Luxemburg with parliamentary elections, and in Ireland with a referendum. Competing media events like the Euro 2004 soccer tournament also influenced the European vote. In the host country Portugal, the Euro 2004 tournament totally eclipsed the European Parliament campaign. As it happens, this contest ended prematurely on June 9 when the top candidate for the opposition Socialist Party died of a heart attack while on the campaign trail.

Domestic issues and quarrels dominated electoral campaigns in all twenty-five member-states. Traditionally, European elections have served as a vote of confidence or no-confidence in the ruling government and in the European Union as a whole. In Italy and the UK, campaigns centered on domestic issues and involvement in the Iraq war. In Italy, the debate turned into a duel between Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi. In Spain, the Socialists, having pulled Spanish troops out of Iraq, continued criticizing the Conservatives for their war-mongering. In the UK, Prime Minister Tony Blair's pro-European line was under fire. Former Labor MP and number-one candidate in the anti-European UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) Robert Kilroy-Silk called for a withdrawal of the UK from the EU. In France, the elections turned into a vote of confidence in President Jacques Chirac's social and economic policies. In Sweden as in neighboring Denmark, nationalists and anti-Europeans challenged the pro-European policies of their respective governments. Although in general pro-European, the Swedish public also deeply distrusts the EU, which is seen as a threat to the welfare state. Only in some member-states like Finland - the exception that proves the rule - have European elections not functioned as a vote of confidence in the government. Here, the issues debated included the fate of social security, EU structural funds, agriculture, and the future of non-alignment.

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Apart from the war in Iraq, Turkey's entry into the European Union was also on the political agenda in many member-states, notably in Austria, Greece, France, and Germany. Predictably, the German right CDU-CSU (Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union) opposed Turkey's accession to the European Union, whereas the Socialists and Greens on the left favored it. In Germany, the domestic political calendar also had an impact on the campaigns. The European elections were the first electoral contest on a national scale since September 2002, when Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was re-elected. The next national parliamentary elections are only in 2006. As in Poland, where premature legislative elections are anticipated, it seemed that the German European elections would serve as an 'ersatz' for legislative elections.

As to the ten new EU member-states, eight of which are from the former Communist bloc, an eagerness to join the EU was coupled with distrust toward Brussels and the older members. Exceptions were Cyprus, Malta, Hungary, and Slovenia, all Euro-enthusiasts. The Czech and Slovak electorates, on the other hand had not overcome their suspicion of politicians and their broken promises after decades of Communist rule. In the Czech Republic, the debates revolved around the future of the European Constitution and the notorious democratic deficit. In Poland nationalists and ultra-Catholics, who demanded among other things a reference to Christian tradition in the new European constitution, set out to challenge the centre-left government. For the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, Brussels seemed abstract and far away. In Latvia especially, the European Constitution, domestic political quarrels, and social security occupied the public's attention. In some of the new European Union member states, populist discourse equated Brussels with Moscow and a loss of national sovereignty.

To grab the attention of absentee voters, parties throughout the EU recruited non-professional celebrity candidates to their lists. In Italy, Finland, Estonia, and the Czech Republic, for example, the candidates and their personal characteristics were meticulously scrutinized in the press, while important issues such the European Union's budget were hardly discussed. In Estonia, Chanel supermodel Carmen Kass was a top candidate of the rightist Res Publica list, stating that she wanted to give 'Estonia a boost' on the world stage. On the French political scene, former Finnish MEP, Finnish national icon and world rally champion Ari Vatanen set up his campaign in the south of France pole-positioned by Chirac as number two on the center-right list UMP (Union pour un mouvement populaire). Declaring that he was not political in the traditional sense of the term, his agenda consisted of defending the interests of the Provence wine growers and fishermen.

Due to the eastern enlargement of the European Union, the defense of the national interest took center stage in several previous member states. Top politicians, including French president Jacques Chirac and Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen, expressed their concern about the diminished influence of their countries' representatives in a larger European Parliament. The new French election law was also viewed in this context. Splitting the country into eight electoral districts, it was partly designed to bifurcate the political spectrum and favor the largest parties on the left and the right, the Socialists and the

UMP, while disadvantaging smaller parties. To drive the message home, Chirac appealed 'in the interest of France' for voters to cast their ballots for big-party candidates.

In sum, with opinions split over Europe within political parties, and no visible political stakes to be fought for, election campaigns centered on domestic issues and celebrity gimmicks. Indeed, the Greens were the exception in conducting a European-level campaign. Ironically, the pan-European issues most widely discussed were Turkey's entrance into the European Union and the European Constitution - two issues outside of the European Parliament's competence. Although debates did occasionally make mention of the bigger issues of foreign policy and security, economic and social policies, and the national benefits of European Union membership, they did so only marginally. Indeed, the real political outcome of these first post-euro and post 9/11 elections will depend not on any public debate, but on how the winners organize themselves politically in the post-election phase. Will the Eurosceptics form their own political group, breaking the dominance of the centre-right EPP-ED (European People's Party-European Democrats)? For this, we will have to wait until the newly elected representatives meet for the first time on July 20, to assemble a new European Parliament.

Niilo Kauppi is Senior Research Fellow at the Academy of Finland.

The Interinstitutional Balance in the EU: What has Happened Since 1999?

Michael Shackleton

HOW FAR HAS THE delicate balance between the European Parliament, Council and Commission been affected by the events of the last five years since the 1999 European elections and the establishment of the Prodi Commission? The answer is of more than academic interest: the activity and output of the enlarged EU of 25 will be heavily influenced by the way in which the three institutions interpret their roles and their relationships with each other.

1999 could be fairly described as the first year of "Euro-parliamentarism".¹ The Parliament's role in the institutional triangle was revolutionized. In March of that year the report of the Committee of Independent Experts set up by the EP to examine fraud, nepotism and mismanagement, notably in relation to the award of contracts, prompted the collective resignation of the Commission. The resignation took place without Parliament adopting a formal motion of censure but there was good reason to believe that it would have done so and certainly the Commission thought that it would, if it had failed to act itself.

Two months later the Amsterdam Treaty came into force and reinforced substantially the legislative role of the Parliament vis-à-vis the Council. The number of areas subject to the codecision procedure under Article 251 was more than doubled from 15 to 38 (later to be increased to 43 by Nice) and the procedure itself was revised to reinforce the level of parity between the two institutions. Agreement could now be reached without Council having to adopt a common position and Council could no longer re-submit its common position if negotiations in the conciliation committee (the last phase in the procedure) were unsuccessful.

These events were the prelude to five years that have transformed

the institutional landscape. Above all, in the legislative domain, where the three institutions are condemned by the Treaties to work closely together, the balance has undergone significant change. Central to this change has been the dramatic reinforcement of the interaction between the Parliament and Council. They had already started to deal with each other more intensively in the Maastricht era after codecision was introduced in 1993, obliging them to negotiate face-to-face if agreement was not reached after two readings. However, following Amsterdam the number of codecision and conciliations rose dramatically with 403 legislative acts adopted up to May 2004, some two and a half times more than had been approved in the previous five years.² 84 of these acts were adopted after conciliation between Parliament and Council at a stage of the procedure when the Commission is restricted by the Treaties to the role of mediator and can no longer withdraw its proposal. For their part, Council and Parliament were obliged to have much closer contacts as they programmed their work to meet the tight deadlines laid down in the Treaties. They had to look for ways to overcome their differences across a large number of pieces of legislation, many of them having to be dealt with at the same time.

However, it was not simply the volume of legislation that drove the two institutions together. It was also the new provision that laid down that agreement could be reached at first reading without Council adopting a common position. This proved to be much more than a residual category for non-controversial issues. Nearly 30% of all codecision legislation between 1999 and 2004 was adopted in this way, the percentage rising to just under 40% in the last year of the legislature before enlargement. Both institutions perceived that the Community's legislative procedure could be accelerated in this way. At the same time, each Council Presidency could more readily manage the legislative agenda and establish a scorecard of the acts adopted during its six-month period in office. Yet such management could only work by means of close cooperation between Council Presidency ministers and officials and Members of the Parliament, cooperation that now spreads over the whole legislative period from the emergence of Commission proposals to the final phase of conciliation.

Moreover, Council came to recognize that it needed to take into account the likely attitude of the Parliament before it moved towards a first reading common position. A classic example was the Takeovers Directive. In July 2001 Parliament rejected on a tied vote the outcome of conciliation negotiations on this highly controversial piece of legislation. As a result, the legislative procedure had to begin again with a new Commission proposal. The proposal that emerged was one that met strong resistance in both Council and Parliament but negotiations took place during the second half of 2003 that allowed a directive to be adopted at first reading.

Does this mean that the Parliament is usurping the Commission's role as the Council's main interlocutor? Certainly the Commission is now at a structural disadvantage, less able to manage the direction of the legislative process. This is already clear at first reading where the Commission retains the right to modify or withdraw its proposal after Parliament has acted and before Council adopts a common position. Such a right is, however, somewhat theoretical if Council indicates it has a majority to adopt Parliament's amendments. To modify the proposal and thereby oblige Council to find unanimity would be likely to make the Commission extremely unpopular. The Takeovers Directive

underlined the dilemma: Commissioner Bolkestein was strongly opposed to the deal reached between Parliament and Council but the Commission as a whole was not prepared to exercise its formal right to withdraw the proposal.

The temptation for the legislative authority to ride roughshod over the Commission has also taken more overt forms. In principle, there continues to be very broad, though not universal, support for the Commission to retain its monopoly right over legislative initiative. However, in practice, there were a number of codecision files where agreement depended on the legislation specifying when and what kind of further proposal the Commission should produce. The Commission was obliged to issue statements objecting to the practice and thereby acknowledging its lack of power to prevent an assertive Parliament from imposing its wishes in this way if Council could be persuaded that this was the price of agreement.

Parliament's willingness to contemplate infringing the right of initiative of the Commission in this way can be dismissed as an aberration restricted to isolated cases. However, it can be seen as part of a wider debate about the nature of parliamentarism at the European level. The growth of interaction between Council and Parliament has proved remarkably successful precisely because it has enabled MEPs to exercise influence in a way that was not possible when it depended on the good offices of the Commission to put its position to the Council or needed Commission support for its amendments to oblige Council to find unanimity, rather than a qualified majority, to reject them. Direct contacts have necessarily reduced the sense of dependence on the Commission and increased Parliament's sense of its own improved status.

This increase in relative status contrasts with the experience of the Commission. The Santer resignation sent shockwaves through the institution, combining a sense of injustice with a readiness to respond ever more readily to requests from Parliament to keep it informed in the interests of accountability. It would be rash to assume on this basis that the Commission has therefore effectively replaced Parliament as the junior partner in the institutional triangle. The range of the Commission's responsibilities include a wide range of tasks, such as leading international trade negotiations or taking decisions on potential abuses of competition, where it continues to enjoy a substantial level of autonomy and relative insulation from the pressures of the Parliament. However, five years of "Euro-parliamentarism" have shown the difficulty of maintaining the traditional balance between the three institutions. The assertion of the democratic principle has served to undermine long-standing conceptions of the roles that they should each play in the legislative domain, with the Commission finding itself at a growing structural disadvantage in the face of a Parliament and Council, increasingly at ease with each other.

Michael Shackleton is a member of the European Parliament Secretariat, Brussels³

Transnational Party Dynamics in the EP **Olivier Costa**

SINCE 1952, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (EP) has progressed from being an assembly, almost devoid of any real power, to being a "proper" parliament endowed with all the symbolic and institutional

attributes of an assembly in a parliamentary system. The EP has steadily increased its powers and influence during the IGCs and thanks to the efforts of the MEPs. But the electorate still does not feel really concerned, hence the significant low levels of turnout during EP elections.

Two factors may account for this phenomenon. First, the EP influence in the institutional system is hardly perceptible, mainly because there is no partisan link with the Commission. In fact, EP elections have little impact on EU politics, hence voter apathy. Secondly, the EP - and more generally speaking the EU - works in a complex and "consensus-based" way, which does not correspond to the political traditions of most member states. EU citizens are in fact shocked by the discrepancy that exists between an institutional organization close to the Westminster model and the non-majoritarian nature of EU policy-making.

For many politicians and opinion makers, the main issue is thus to "normalize" how the EP functions - through reaffirming the left-right divide, challenging compromises endlessly renegotiated between the Socialists and the Christian Democrats and creating a stable majority coalition. Political scientists should be able to provide interesting lessons. The great majority of researchers and academics have focused their attention on the study of votes and coalitions in their approach to the EP, thus collecting a vast amount of data and detailed research on the cohesion of political groups and coalition logics within the EP⁴. Even in the more comprehensive works of reference that deal with the EP's contribution to democracy in the EU, most authors tackle such issues as MEP behavior and coalition formation⁵.

These studies highlight the great level of cohesion that exists within the main EP groups - the Group of the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED), the European Liberal, Democratic and Reformist Group (ELDR), the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. This may sound surprising given the very national nature of European elections and the relative weakness of the European parties. But cohesion and party discipline are particularly strong - from 60% to 70% on average, which are remarkable results even compared with national parliaments. Figures are somewhat lower for the parties with a more anti-Europe dimension, which tend to be less ideological and more "technical" - the Union for a Europe of the Nations Group, the Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities, the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left. By and large, there has been quite stable cohesion until recently - with the notable exception of the EPP-ED group in which British Conservative MEPs, first elected in 1999, vie for more autonomy.

We should not draw too hasty conclusions from such statistical studies, especially if we analyze the determining factors in MEP behavior and party dynamics. Few researchers have reflected on the very notion of a "political group" when applied to the EP. They take it for granted that once a group constituted according to the rules of procedure has shown some form of cohesion, it may then be compared to any national political group. But they tend to overlook the irreducible specificities of the EP. The EP political groups do not stem from strongly organized parties, campaigning on precise platforms and maintaining strong party discipline in support of government policies. The supranational dimension of the assembly, the absence of any genuine "European" party and the nature of the relations between the EP and the Commission

imply that parliamentary groups have other functions. They are mainly structures helping to make the functioning of the EP more rational, gathering MEPs according to their "preferences" and giving them some practical advantages in the exercise of their mandate. The role of the groups consists in helping common opinions emerge rather than to impose them, through negotiations and debates where the national delegations play a key role.

The word "party discipline" is thus inappropriate. We should rather speak of statistical cohesion, with few constraints. In fact, MEPs vote with their groups for other reasons - because common positions are the result of democratic negotiations or "package deals"; because they find it impossible to keep track of the multitude of reports submitted to the EP, and thus rely on their peers' opinions (more than 400 legislative acts were adopted during the last term of office); because the political groups are the main place for socializing; because cohesion is a necessary condition for the EP's global influence; because MEPs are influenced by the weight of national political traditions and practices.

The study of coalition formation is more complex. Generally speaking, the EU decision-making process requires flexible majorities in the EP, according to the various procedures, the issues at stake or the global context of negotiations. There has never really been any stable EP majority and majorities are formed for each vote. The original pro- / anti- Europe cleavage (particularly strong in the 80s when the PES and the EPP massively voted together thus assuming some form of "co-leadership" of the EP) gained momentum up to 1999.

There are three main reasons for this coalition. First, in most legislative and budgetary votes, an "absolute majority" of all MEPs - not only those who vote - is required. Second, in the EP institutional logic, where many actors have a "veto power", compromise seeking is the rule. This is especially true for final votes, much less so in the case of amendments. It also appears that the PES-EPP coalition is more effective on judicial and environmental problems than on economic ones. Finally, we must pay attention to converging opinions of the PES et EPP on European integration (which was initiated by the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats) and on such matters as market integration, institutions or the Common Agricultural Policy.

Such a left-right alignment does not prevent political oppositions within the EP. In the 1994-1999 period, there was generally a right-wing alternative majority (an EPP-ELDR coalition) when no agreement could be found in the centre. According to analysts, the surprising victory of the EPP in 1999 meant the end of the alliance with the PES, as illustrated by the agreement passed between the EPP-ED (extended to the British Conservative MEPs) and the ELDR with a view to gaining the EP presidency which was to be held by the PES according to a "technical agreement" between the PES and the EPP.

But such an analysis should be more nuanced, for three main reasons. First, there has not been any dramatic fall in the number of joint PES/EPP-ED votes. As we mentioned earlier, both groups still vote along the same lines; this concerned 70% of the cases in the early stages of the term of office. The slightly lower rate of convergence at the end of the term may partly be explained by the approaching elections, thus inciting MEPs to give a better and more militant image of their activities, that is more in accordance with the expectations of their electorate.

Second, the PES/EPP-ED divide has widened on socio-

economic and socio-political questions, and become more explicit in single majority votes, and finally, the ELDR now plays a pivotal role.

The impression of persistent converging opinions as expressed in the way the two main groups vote may thus be misleading and should not hide a growing left-right cleavage on a greater number of issues.

It is hard to speculate on the future evolution of the EP. EU enlargement, the results of the EP elections and their potential influence on the appointment of the new Commission, together with the possible ratification of the Constitution could drastically alter partisan dynamics within the EP, both in terms of cohesion and party relations. Though a bipolar organization is unlikely, we may well witness in the short term the formation of one or several stable alternative coalitions, on various matters, and the emergence of a stronger partisanship dimension in the relations between the EP, the Council and the Commission.

Olivier Costa is CNRS research fellow at the Institute of Political Science in Bordeaux

The Prospect of 'United Centre-Right Government' in the EU **Simon Hix**

THE IMPACT OF THE 2004 European elections on the political balance inside the European Parliament was marginal. The balance between the centre-left and centre-right in the 'Sixth' directly-elected European Parliament' (2004-09) will be almost identical to the balance in the 'Fifth' Parliament (1999-04). In both the outgoing and incoming parliaments, the three groups on the centre-right (in the EPP, ELDR and UEN) control about 50 percent of the seats, and the three groups on the centre-left (PES, Greens and Radical Left) control about 40 percent of the seats.

However, the relationship between the centre-left and centre-right forces inside the Parliament and the political forces inside the EU's other two policy-making institutions - the Council and the Commission - is likely to be profoundly different in this Parliament compared to the last. There are two reasons for this.

First, whereas for most of the Fifth Parliament the Council was dominated by governments controlled by parties on the centre-left, for most of the Sixth Parliament the Council looks set to be dominated by governments controlled by parties in the centre-right. In July 1994, Social Democrats and Greens were in government in twelve of the then fifteen member states. In July 2004, in contrast, in fifteen of the now twenty-five governments are dominated by parties on the centre-right. This transformation in the political complexion of the Council is not simply a result of enlargement of the EU to ten new member states, since about half of the new member states have centre-left governments. Rather, this change results from the natural pendulum swing of government make-up in the fifteen existing EU states.

Second, whereas the 1999-04 Commission was the first to be dominated by centre-left politicians, the 2004-99 Commission will be dominated by centre-right politics. This is not simply a function of the changing colour of the governments in the Council, who pick the Commissioners. Another factor is that the next Commission will be the first to be appointed under the provisions of the Nice Treaty;

where each member state has only one Commissioner. Under the previous rules, most governments in the big member state appointed one Commissioner from the left and one from the right. Hence, even if the Council was dominated by one political force, the Commission would usually be more politically balanced. However, this time, the Commission will exactly reflect the political make-up of the Council at the time of the appointment of the Commission (in the autumn of 2004). As a result, whereas twelve of the twenty members of Prodi Commission were either Socialists, Greens, or Left-Liberals (Prodi himself), the next Commission will probably contain fifteen out of twenty-five politicians from the centre-right - and may even have seventeen centre-right politicians if new centre-right governments emerge in Poland and the Czech Republic before the Autumn.

Hence, for most of the 1999-04 Parliament the EU experienced by what scholars of US government would call 'divided government', or what scholars in France would call cohabitation: with a Parliament dominated by the centre-right and the Council and Commission dominated by the centre-left. This had significant implications. In this period, the largest party in the Parliament, the EPP, behaved like the 'official opposition' in the EU: opposing policy and legislative initiatives from the Council and EPP as a matter of principle. This was exacerbated by the fact that the dominant national party in the EPP, the German Christian Democrats (who controlled the leader of the EPP and many of the most senior figures in the party group) were furious with the Gerhard Schröder for picking two left-wing Commissioners from Germany. Hence, the largest national delegation in the European Parliament, in the largest party group, was not represented in either the Council or the Commission.

In contrast, in the 1999-2004 Parliament, the PES group behaved like a 'minority government': eager to support proposals from 'their' Commission and Council, but lacking political support in the Parliament to push these through. Not surprisingly, this period was marked by several high-profile political battles between the Commission and the Council, on the one side, and the Parliament on the other: such as the End-of-Life Vehicles Directive, the Takeovers' Directive, and the Workers' Consultation Directive. Against the expectations of much of the theoretical research on the EU legislative process - which assumes that the Parliament is more 'integrationist' and 'regulatory' than the Council, and so is likely to accept most agreements between the Commission and the Council - in this period, the majority in the Parliament was often less regulatory than the majorities in the Council and Commission, and so was potentially closer to the Status Quo than a more 'left' proposals from the other institutions. For example, in the adoption of the End-of-Life Vehicles Directive - which set new environmental standards in the manufacturing and recycling of cars - the more 'free market' EPP-ELDR-UEN majority in the Parliament successfully watered down the highly regulatory legislative framework that had been agreed by the 'Red-Green' coalition in the Commission and Council.

Relations are likely to be dramatically different in the Sixth Parliament. For the first time since the first direct elections of the Parliament, all three legislative institutions of the EU will be dominated by a centre-right (Conservative-Liberal) majority. The prospect of such 'united government' could potential produce a dramatic change the EU's policy agenda. A centre-right coalition, led by a centre-right Commission President, an EPP or ELDR President of the Parliament, together with a few key centre-right/neo-liberal heads of government, could give real teeth to the 'Lisbon agenda' of structural economic reform. So far, the method of

implementing the Lisbon agenda through intergovernmental agreements outside the EU's legislative procedures has produced few results. However, a centre-right coalition across the EU's legislative institutions could use the legal instruments in the EU Treaty, for example by adopting a Directive harmonizing labor market regulations for small and medium-size enterprises.

An 'oversized majority', under the qualified-majority rules, would still be required in the Council to adopt such legislation. But, in contrast to the previous parliament, any (liberalizing) legislative proposal from the Commission and the Council would almost certainly pass through the Parliament with only minor amendments. Also, a Liberal-Conservative coalition would not hold together on all issues on the EU's legislative agenda. Whereas Liberals (in the ELDR in the Parliament, or in the Council or Commission) might support Conservatives on market liberalization issues, they would probably join with the Socialists to block a social conservative agenda: such as restrictive EU immigration policies, or anti-environment policies.

If such 'united centre-right government' is able to push through more market liberalizing policies at the European level, what European voters will think is uncertain. On the one hand, the centre-left, who have gradually become more pro-European than the centre-right in most EU member states, may return to their positions of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Socialists opposed the EU in fear that market integration in Europe would undermine the social democratic model in many member states. A liberalizing EU might be more popular in the UK, but centre-left parties in Continental Europe and Scandinavia might gradually return to seeing the nation-state as a means of protecting social and labor regulations against global capital.

On the other hand, if the EU begins to push a particular political agenda for a period, Europe's citizens will be more aware of what the EU does and that 'politics' in the EU can make a difference. They might even react against the EU governing coalition's neo-liberal policies by supporting left-wing parties in the 2009 European elections - in other words, using European elections to try to influence the policy agenda of the EU rather than the political agenda of national politics!

Simon Hix is Reader in European Union Politics and Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science

NOTES

¹ Cf. Renaud Dehousse (2000) '1999: An 1 du Parlementarisme européen' in *Pouvoirs*, 93, 197-207.

² For figures quoted here see Activity report 1 May 1999 to 30 April 2004 of the delegations to the Conciliation Committee presented by Vice-Presidents Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, Charlotte Cederschiöld and Renzo Imbeni (PE 287.644) under Conciliations in the European Parliament Website.

³ The views expressed here are strictly personal and do not represent the official position of the European Parliament.

⁴ For instance: S. Hix, A. Kreppel, A. Noury, "The Party System in the EP: Collusive or Competitive?" *JCMS*, 41(2), 2003, 309-331; A. Kreppel, *The EP and the Supranational Party System*, Cambridge

University Press, 2002; T. Raunio, *The European Perspective: Transnational Party Groups in the 1989-1994 EP*, Ashgate, 1997.

⁵ B. Steunenberg et J. Thomassen (ed.), *The European Parliament: Moving Toward Democracy in the EU*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.