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## The 2014 European Parliament Elections in Slovenia : Hardly any Novelty

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Preferencje Polityczne : postawy, identyfikacje, zachowania 9, 77-96

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2014

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## **THE 2014 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN SLOVENIA: HARDLY ANY NOVELTY**

### ***Abstract:***

In the article the main characteristics of the European Parliament elections in 2014 in relation to the characteristics of the both previous elections to the Parliament were analysed. First, the legal framework is presented, followed by the presentation of candidate lists. As it is frequently the case, the authors for the analysis employed the analytical framework presented by Reif and Schmitt (1980). Following the framework, it is obvious the elections in Slovenia again demonstrated many elements of the second-order elections framework, for example in terms of the turnout, success of the governmental parties, success of small parties, as well as almost complete absence of party programmes, Euroscepticism and European topics in the campaign. Since several important domestic events happened just before the EP elections (e.g. resignation of the government at the beginning of May and the fact the leader of the biggest opposition party was by the court found guilty of corruption activity and sent to the prison at the end of April) such developments did not come as a big surprise.

### ***Key words:***

Slovenia, European Parliament, elections, Euroscepticism

### ***Characteristics of the Party System and Parties***

When talking about the party system in Slovenia it is possible to see, in the context of the post-socialist European countries, its relative stability for the most of the period since the first multiparty and democratic elections in 1990 [Lewis 2001; Haughton and Deegan Krause 2010; Fink-Hafner, Krašovec 2013], despite the fairly undemanding requirements for establishing a new party (only 200 voter signatures and some formal documents are needed). However, in spite of such formal openness to new parties, only one small

new party (either genuinely new or a breakaway from another party) entered the National Assembly following each election<sup>1</sup> in the 1992-2008 period [Fink-Hafner, Krašovec 2013]. The radical change in this regard came with the early elections in 2011 when two new parties, Positive Slovenia (PS) and the Civic List (DL), won as much as 37% of the vote; Positive Slovenia with its charismatic leader Z. Janković was also a relative winner of the elections with 28.5% of the vote. For the second time, newcomers played a very important role on the early elections held in July 2014, when the relative winner of the elections, the Party of Miro Cerar (SMC) won 34.5%, while the United Left (ZL) coalition received 5.9%.

As claimed by Fink-Hafner [2012: 204], in Slovenia only occasionally has it been possible to detect elements of anti-system parties, while small (new) parliamentary parties have mitigated anti-party sentiments in the general public. The Slovenian party system can be described as dynamic despite the stability of the electoral rules [Fink-Hafner 2006: 222]. While at the beginning of the democratic transition a polarised party system was established, visible in the number of parties, the existence of bilateral opposition and ideological distance, later mainly elements of moderate pluralism can be observed. There was, however, a short period with an element of a predominant party system since in the 2000 elections the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) obtained the biggest share of votes as an individual party in the system so far (36.2%) [Fink-Hafner 2012], and a similar situation happened in the 2014 elections with the SMC.

When speaking about ideological camps, it is usually said that a tripolar (conservative, liberal and social democratic) ideological structure has been clearly visible in Slovenia (during periods of political pluralism) since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [Prunk 2011]. On the other hand, Fink-Hafner [2012: 201] argues that, with the passage from the polarised to predominant elements of moderate pluralism, bipolar party competition has been established.

Due to the country's gradualist approach to economic transition, quite specific in the context of other post-socialist European countries, and the clear expectations of the population to retain the welfare state, all parliamentary parties advocated similar, social democratic socio-economic policies until the 2004 elections [Stanojević, Krašovec 2011; Fink-Hafner 2012], thereby reducing the importance of the socio-economic component in the cleavage system. Yet this situation changed during the 2004 elections when the economic component in the cleavage system became more evident largely because of the Slovenian Democratic Party's (SDS) (a relative winner of the 2004 elections) final turn towards the conservative party camp. In the context of the great economic and fiscal crisis that Slovenia has faced since 2009, the question of

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<sup>1</sup> The exception being the 2004 elections when no new party entered the parliament.

social democratic vs. (neo)liberal socio-economic policies became more evident. On the other hand, the liberal–conservative divide, usually in Slovenia referred to as an ‘ideological cleavage’ (mostly connected with questions over the role of the Catholic Church in society as well as in politics, the rights of minorities and, perhaps a bit strangely from the viewpoint of other countries, over developments during WW II – Partisans vs. Home Guard, or opponents of the occupation forces vs. their collaborators) has been always sharp, particularly because the cleavage has frequently been interwoven with others, for example, centre–periphery, state–church, rural–urban, traditionalism–modernism, and communism–anticommunism [Fink-Hafner 2001]. Based on these cleavages, some parties are usually perceived as (centre-)left (for example, Social Democrats (SD), LDS, and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS)) and some as (centre-)right parties (for example, SDS, New Slovenia (NSi) and Slovenian People’s Party (SLS)).

In Slovenia, naturally enough given the PR electoral system and low threshold (3 mandates or in fact 3.3% in the period 1992-2000, and 4% since 2000 elections), all governments have been coalitions of several parties. Due to such characteristics of the electoral system, an almost complete absence of pre-electoral coalitions or electoral alliances in the party system can also be expected [Krašovec, Cabada 2013].

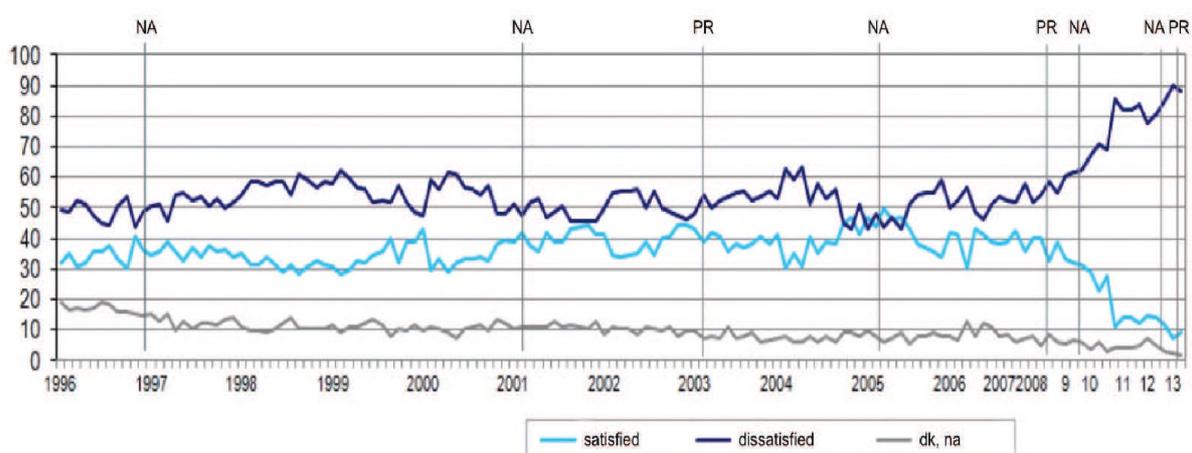
It seems a radical change took place in Slovenian politics with the 2008 elections, which were held almost on the same day as the collapse of Lehman Brothers. The economic crisis provoked by the global credit crunch began to have a serious impact on Slovenia only in the first half of 2009. In 2009, for instance, the GDP dropped by 8.1% and later continued to record negative trends. Unemployment rose from 6.7% in 2008 to 12% at the end of 2011. Borut Pahor’s (SD) coalition government was heavily criticised for being too slow in making decisions and for introducing inappropriate measures to respond to the crisis, although some government measures to combat the crisis were received positively [Haughton, Krašovec 2013]. There was great disappointment with the ineffective 2008–2011 government, and this was compounded by a long list of other challenging political issues that radically reduced trust in political institutions and reduced satisfaction with democracy [Krašovec 2013]. Political scandals and the sense of widespread corruption, along with a government unable to deal with the economic crisis, fuelled support for two new entrants into the 2011 elections.

The 2011 elections brought another break with long-standing tradition when it became clear that the relative winner of the elections, Janković and his PS, would not be able to form a governing coalition, therefore the *formateur* became J. Janša from the SDS. The Janša II government, which also included the DL, DeSUS, SLS and NSi-Christian Democrats), prepared radical austerity

measures, advocated by a positive response from various international organisations. However, the government faced considerable social discontent due to its unilaterally prepared and implemented policies, which led to the largest general strike of public sector employees in 2012. These developments were accompanied by evident corruption(-risk) activities and misuse of public funds by different politicians, as well as by a perceived lack of responsiveness from politicians; this led to a significant wave of protests at the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, which also, for the first time in the history of independent Slovenia, escalated into violent clashes with police [Krašovec 2013]. The protestors, supported by 75% of the population [Politbarometer 2013], were not only concerned with the austerity measures of Janša's government and his leadership style, but also with corrupt politicians and the unethical nature of politics in general [Krašovec 2013]. They therefore demanded the establishment of a new political elite and the return of the kidnapped state to its citizens.

Even though one of the key characteristics of the Slovenian political system since its transition to democracy has been relatively low levels of trust in political parties, in 2005, 11% of voters still trusted parties, while in 2011 this share was only 2%, and in 2013, 1% [Politbarometer 2005; 2011; 2013]. Even though Slovenian voters have clearly preferred a democratic system over an authoritarian system [Toš et al. 1999; 2004; 2009; 2012], satisfaction with democracy has been declining since the beginning of the 1990s. This trend has been especially evident since 2005, while in the post-2009 period it is possible to speak of a collapse of trust in democratic institutions and in the present democratic arrangements in Slovenia in general [Vehovar 2012].

Figure 1. Levels of (dis)satisfaction with democracy in Slovenia (1996-2013) in %



NA - National Assembly elections, PR - Presidential elections

Source: Politbarometer, June 2013.

Taking all these developments into account, it was not a surprise that the Janša II government did not survive the parliamentary term; due to a constructive vote of no-confidence linked to an anti-corruption watchdog's revelations involving Janša himself in February 2013, he was replaced by the A. Bratušek. She, on the other hand, had become acting leader of PS after Janković stepped down from the leadership due to the findings of the anti-corruption commission which had pointed the finger of suspicion in his direction [Haughton, Krašovec 2014]. Bratušek's government, which was composed of the relative winner of 2011 elections, PS, together with the DL, SD, and DeSUS, however, survived for little more than a year. Just prior to the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2014, Bratušek submitted her resignation (and thereby the resignation of her government). Slovenia's first female premier had been successfully challenged for the leadership of the PS by none other than Janković himself. His desire to take back the party leadership not only engendered a split in the party, but provoked the governing coalition to collapse as the smaller parties in the government refused to work alongside PS with the charismatic but controversial Janković at the helm [Krašovec, Haughton 2014].

Table 1. Results of the parliamentary elections in Slovenia in December 2011 and July 2014

PARTY	2011		2014	
	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats
<i>List of Zoran Janković–Positive Slovenia (PS)</i>	28.5	28	3.0	0
<b>Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)</b>	26.2	26	20.7	21
<i>Social Democrats (SD)</i>	10.5	10	6.0	6
<i>Civic List of Gregor Virant–Civic List (DL)</i>	8.4	8	0.6	0
<i>Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS)</i>	6.9	6	10.2	10
<b>Slovenian People's Party (SLS)</b>	6.8	6	3.9	0
<b>New Slovenia–Christian Democrats (NSi)</b>	4.9	4	5.6	5
Party of Miro Cerar (SMC)	/	/	34.5	36
United Left Coalition (ZL)	/	/	6.0	6
Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (ZaAB)	/	/	4.4	4
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)	1.5	0	/	/
Zares	0.6	0	/	/
Others		0		0

**Bold:** Party composition of the Janša II government February 2012 - February 2013;

*Italics:* Party composition of the Bratušek government March 2013 – May 2014.

*The Importance of the EU arena in Slovenia*

As some political scientists have noted [for example, Mair 2000; Ladrech 2002; Lewis, Mansfeldova eds. 2006; Szczerbiak, Taggart eds. 2008; Lewis, Markowski eds. 2011], in the last decade, the EU has begun to be acknowledged as an environment that holds potentially significant consequences for the functioning of national parties and party systems, therefore many relevant Slovenian parties have been interested in being part of it. Almost all parliamentary parties have been formally entering the EU arena since the mid-1990s by establishing official contacts with their European counterparts.

Table 2. The evolution of formal membership of Slovenian parties in European parties

	observer	associate member	full member
NSi (EPP)	2001	2003	2004
LDS (ELDR/ALDE)		1994	1998
SDS (EPP)	2001	2003	2004
(ZL)SD (PES/S&D)	1996	1999	2003
SLS (EPP)	2001	2003	2004
Youth Party of Slovenia (SMS) – European Greens (EFGP/EG)	2003		2006
Zares (ELDR/ALDE)	2008		2008
DL (ELDR/ALDE)	2013		2013
PS (ELDR/ALDE)			2014*

Source: Krašovec and Lajh (2009); ALDE data

\* At the end of January 2014, the PS decided to apply for full membership in ALDE. Due to the split of the party after a battle over the party leader position at the end of April 2014, just before the ALDE congress at the beginning of May the PS withdrew its application for ALDE membership

Unlike some other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries [Lewis, Mansfeldova eds. 2006; Szczerbiak, Taggart eds. 2008; Haughton 2009], it seems the EU environment has minimal impact on the Slovenian party system. Already in 1997 all parliamentary parties (except for the Slovenian National Party - SNS) decided to overcome their other differences and conflicts, and sign an *Agreement on Co-operation in the EU Accession Process*. This broad consensus on EU membership as an ultimate Slovenian goal indeed meant that all major EU-related topics in Slovenia were defined as national projects [Krašovec, Lajh 2009]. Taking into account the generally favourable public opinion towards the EU, only some small and/or non-parliamentary parties and occasionally the parliamentary SNS tried to play the Eurosceptic

card, which however proved not to be a trump card in the electoral competition [Krašovec, Lajh 2009]. Based on these arguments, Krašovec and Lajh [2009] conclude that EU issues do not directly influence inter-party competition, since the EU only limited party competition (which is unusual when we compare Slovenia to other countries). Therefore, EU issues held particular salience for national politics but little salience for party politics [Krašovec, Lajh 2009: 58].

### ***Legal framework for the EP Elections***

Slovenian legislation on EP elections offers all Slovenian citizens at least 18 years old the opportunity to vote and stand as a candidate. In addition, it allows EU citizens with permanent residence in Slovenia to vote or stand as a candidate. Even though the legislation remained, in the most important aspects, the same as it was for the EP elections in 2009, some smaller changes were, nevertheless, made before the 2014 EP elections. The EU demanded some changes in regulations concerning candidacy of an EU citizen in a country of which he/she is not a citizen. Besides this, the Slovenian government also proposed some of its own changes. According to new legislation adopted by the national parliament at the end of January 2014, names, abbreviations and logos of EU parties to which national parties are linked to can be officially used in electoral material as well as on ballots. Some of the parties took advantage of this opportunity (for example, SD, Zares and DL).

Candidates for EP elections can be proposed by parties (the candidate list for the EP election must be supported by four MPs or 1,000 voters) or voters (the candidate list for the EP election must be supported by 3,000 voters). The law establishes a proportional electoral system (using the d'Hondt method) with a single constituency and the possibility of a preference vote, which however does not have an absolute. Slovenian legislation on EP elections interferes somewhat with the procedure of selecting candidates within parties since a certain list of candidates cannot comprise less than 40% of representatives of each gender and at least one representative of each gender must be placed in the top half of the list. If this gender equality norm is not respected, the list of candidates is considered invalid.

The election campaign officially starts 30 days before the date of the election and the Election and Referendum Campaign Act also determines the financial aspects of campaigns. The act sets the upper limit of election campaign expenditure for both national and EP elections in the same manner. In 2004, each candidate list could spend no more than 60 Slovenian tolar (or 0.25 EUR) per voter, while the amount was 0.40 EUR in 2009 and 2014. Amendments to the Election and Referendum Campaign Act at the end of 2013 introduced

a prohibition on contributions by legal entities to political parties or lists of candidates. Nonetheless, in contrast to the prohibition on financing of candidate lists from abroad at national elections, such financing is allowed in the case of EP elections (although not by legal entities).

The law prohibits the post of MEP being held simultaneously with the position of MP, member of the government, or member of a local representative body.

According to the legislation, candidate lists had to be submitted to the National Electoral Commission by 25 April 2014, and from this day until 24 May 2014, an electoral campaign was formally permitted.

### *Candidate Lists and Candidates*

The majority of competitors waited with submission of their candidate lists until the very last moment. Altogether as many as 17 candidate lists were submitted, but regarding one of the lists, the electoral commission found that it did not fulfil all the formal criteria and therefore could not compete in the elections (12 candidate lists competed in the 2009 EP elections and 13 in 2004). In all of the elections, all parliamentary parties offered their (own) candidate lists and some non-parliamentary parties also competed, as well as some independent lists.

All current MEPs except for two (both from the **Slovenian Democratic Party** (EPP) whose candidate list was led by a current MEP) ran in the elections. Usually no candidate selection process can avoid disagreements [Krašovec and Štremfel 2007] and this was the case with the 2014 EP elections. The final formation of the joint **New Slovenia and Slovenian People's Party** (EPP) candidate list (led by a current MEP) with inclusion of one particular person from New Slovenia to the list provoked huge dissatisfaction with one of New Slovenia's local organisations and the whole leadership of this local organisation resigned in protest. The decision of the **Social Democrats** (S&D) that the party leader will be the first on the list, followed by both current MEPs, came as a surprise and some disagreements with this decision could be observed in the party. The candidate list of the **Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia**, which is not a member of any European party, was headed by a current ALDE MEP Ivo Vajgl who felt that his party **Zares** supported some Eurosceptic stances, therefore he decided to leave it. Even though four liberal parties, all ALDE members (LDS, Zares, DL and member to-be - PS), were engaged in discussion on formation of a joint candidate list for several months, all parties in the end ran in the elections independently even though the ALDE candidate for President of the European Commission Guy Verhofstadt tried to persuade them to form a joint list during his visit to Slovenia at the beginning of April 2014. After the EU Commissioner J. Potočnik (who would probably be accepted by all four

parties as the joint candidate list leader) made a final decision not to run on the elections, the **Civic List** quickly formed its own candidate list, while three other parties (**Positive Slovenia, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and Zares**) tried to negotiate a joint list right until 24 April. It seems that two late developments that occurred in Positive Slovenia led to a decision that the three liberal parties would compete on their own. First, on 25 April, when candidate lists had to be submitted, a Positive Slovenia congress was held and Zares announced it was not going to form a joint list with this party with Jankovič on the top. Second, several days before the deadline for submission of candidate lists, PS announced it had selected J. Mencinger, a prominent non-partisan retired economist, who usually has critical stances toward the EU and its economic policies, as its leading candidate, also in the event of a joint three-party candidate list. The current MEP J. Kacin (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia) opposed the idea because he saw Mencinger as a Eurosceptic. On the other hand, PS explained it was not possible to form the three-party joint list since Kacin insisted on being the *Spitzenkandidat* of the list. At the end Kacin submitted his own list called **List Kacin – Concrete**, while Liberal Democracy of Slovenia was only its supporter.

After all the above-mentioned turmoil and ‘popular demands’ in 2012 and 2013, it was expected that some new parties and new faces would enter the political arena and fight for representation in the EP. Indeed, several (new) non-parliamentary parties submitted their candidate lists, including **United Left** which took part under the banner of the European Left, and **Solidarity** which had not decided which European party it would like to join (anyway the party supported Martin Schultz for the President of the European Commission), but selected eight candidates for the elections. A civil society organisation submitted its list under the name **I Believe - List of Igor Šoltes**. A candidate list formed by a citizens’ action or political experiment ran in the elections as well. Namely, a Facebook action called a **Dream Job** was organised and eight candidates among people who expressed an interest in getting a dream job in the EP were selected by lot. As the organisers of the action explained, they wished to show that sometimes selection by lot yields better results than elections. In addition, the **Pirate Party of Slovenia** submitted its list (as the only party with just one candidate on the list) as did the **Slovenian National Party**, which after being in the national parliament for twenty years stayed out of the 2011 elections. The **Greens of Slovenia** and the **Party of the Slovenian Nation** submitted their candidate lists even though they had not expressed any interest in participating in the electoral competition. **Forward Slovenia** also submitted its list of candidates but was rejected by the Electoral Commission due to formal defectiveness. The **Youth Party – European Greens** (EFGP/EG) started a candidate selection procedure but at the end it decided not to enter the election game.

In 2014 as well, candidate lists were (as they were in 2004 and 2009) dominated by men - women headed only two candidate lists (Zares and United Left).

Since the law establishes incompatibility of the MEP position with several other top political posts, we could expect that top-ranking politicians, especially those from parliamentary parties, would not run in the EP elections. These expectations were mostly proved right in the 2004 and 2009 elections [Topolinjak 2010], and also in 2014 only a few parliamentary parties' leaders competed (SD, NSi and SLS) as well as several leaders of non-parliamentary parties (Zares, SNS, Greens of Slovenia; the United Left coalition was headed by the leader of one of the three parties which formed the coalition), while only one current minister ran in the 2014 elections (Civic List).

### ***Programmatic Positions of Political Parties and Lists of Candidates that Entered the 2014 EP Electoral Race and the Electoral Campaign***

The 2014 EP elections were in many ways comparable to the EP 2004 and 2009 elections since they likewise relied heavily on the traditional tools of campaigning [Deželan 2005]. Consequently, the EP elections emerged as a separate type of election in the Slovenian political arena when compared to other elections in the country. As a rule, during the campaign competing parties and lists replace the otherwise popular practice of capital-intensive campaigns (TV commercials, ads, banners) with labour-intensive campaigning [Deželan 2005]. This practice emerged in the past due to the lack of resources and/or approaching national elections [Krašovec 2005] and remained as a best practice example since this mode of campaigning was appropriated by the surprising first winner of the EP elections in Slovenia in 2004 – New Slovenia.

One of the best ways to grasp the plethora of differences between competing political actors in Europe and elsewhere is to examine their electoral manifestos. As manifestos are an “authoritative statement of a party reflecting its programmatic profile for an election” [Merz, Regel 2013: 149], it is clear that already at this point vast differences between political contestants are exposed. To be precise, only six out of the 16 submitted lists of candidates broadly managed to satisfy electoral manifesto criteria [see Merz, Regel 2013] by naming the prepared documents appropriately, reflecting the position of the party together with its programmatic profile as a whole and relating them to the 2014 EP elections specifically. In addition, the SD and SDS were the only parliamentary parties that passed the above-mentioned criteria and even these two parties merely revised and/or upgraded manifestos prepared by their corresponding European party (PES and EPP). The rest of them promoted the programmatic documents of ‘their’ EU parties – either by translating them or merely referring

to them – or just deliberated on election topics on the basis of their party platforms, general viewpoints of the main party leaders or their individual positions on certain topics. The nascent state of the Slovenian party system – despite its two-and-a-half decade existence – is well indicated by the fact that the main government party (PS) did not even bother to draw up a programmatic document for the elections and instead just relied on the views of the candidate heading the list, who was not even a member of the party.

Furthermore, Slovenian political parties habitually wait until the very last moment to launch their manifestos for EP elections. Their launch, if it happens at all, is very rarely in line with the official start of the election campaign (30 days prior to election day) and is also performed very tentatively. This was again evident in the 2014 EP elections since only a few lists of candidates managed to draw up some sort of electoral manifesto only three weeks prior to election day [see Hacler 2014] and even those that managed to do so appeared to validate the so-called ‘bandwagon effect’ – i.e. parties producing manifestos for the sake of having one and primarily preventing situations of being the only one not having a manifesto.<sup>2</sup> This is reinforced by the fact that electoral manifestos are very evasive documents since two months after the elections only a few parties still offer full-text versions of manifestos for citizens to read or download.

As a result, despite manifestos being a rich source of information on the positions of parties and lists of candidates, it is quite difficult to systematically discern programmatic positions of the contesting actors due to the gaps created by candidate lists not having a manifesto or just translating programmatic positions from their European counterparts. Therefore, we supplemented information gathered from manifestos with information from other programmatic documents of parties or lists of candidates and statements of their leaders and frontliners.

In general, the most important issue in the 2014 EP elections was the question of the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties. While in many EU countries such parties recorded good electoral results, this was not the case in Slovenia. Slovenia was more or less marked by the absence of politicisation regarding EU matters, especially prior to EU accession and/or only marginal parties tried to exploit an electoral opportunity playing on the Eurosceptic card, but without (much) success, either in the national parliamentary or EP elections [Krašovec, Lajh 2009]. Nevertheless, the 2009 EP elections exposed some noticeable differences between parties in this regard, which had not been exposed during the 2009 campaign due to the nature of the campaign and the ability of the mass media to determine the main campaign themes. Namely, the 2009 EP elections revealed that some parties

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<sup>2</sup> As reported by Kustec Lipicer and Bilavčič [2010], all parliamentary parties, except for the Slovenian National Party, prepared electoral manifestos for both previous EP elections. But, as a rule, they were relatively short documents and for the 2009 election were generally even shorter than those for the 2004 election.

developed a critical, but at the same time still positive, stance toward the EU. This emerging scepticism was infused by concerns related to the global economic and financial crisis and a more responsible and socially-oriented market economy.

The elections in 2014 brought some new developments in this regard. Given the fact that Slovenia seemed to be on the brink of needing a Eurozone bailout on several occasions in the past few years, some critical stances on the EU and/or its policies could be expected. Not surprisingly, especially new and/or non-parliamentary parties allowed themselves to be more critical of the EU; however, only the radical left parties managed to base their criticism on a systemic set of ideological positions and arguments (Solidarity and United Left), but their fire has been directed more at the policies of austerity than the EU as such [Haughton, Krašovec 2014]. But the novelty was that for the first time, Euroscepticism could be observed in some mainstream parties. Among them, the most vigorously Eurosceptic at the time of the EP elections was the biggest government party (PS), whose candidate list leader Dr. Mencinger (a prominent economist with some political experience) expressed many Eurosceptic stances on EU economic policies. Other major parties, members of the EU parties (EPP, S&D, ALDE), borrowed or adapted programmatic documents from the EU level (action programmes or EU party election manifestos). As a result, their positions remained within the framework of ‘constructive criticism’ and mainly exposed the need for reforms of the Union (for example, the SD). The differences between them were manifested primarily along the ideological lines of their party families.

The only true newcomer whose bid for an MEP post was successful – Igor Šoltes (I Believe - List of Dr. Šoltes) – failed to produce more than a few vague lines on the urgency of better assertion of Slovenian interests in Europe and the need to change our mentality. In essence, his main cards were his track record as a former president of the Court of Audit and a novelty and anti-corruption ticket [Haughton, Krašovec 2014], and he played them well, which in fact was not particularly hard due to the already mentioned developments that have been shaking Slovenia in the past several years. On the other hand surprisingly, the leader of the Slovenian National Party, Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti, who in the 2000 national parliamentary elections took a very critical stance towards the EU, while being more reserved in exposing his party’s Eurosceptic positions in the 2009 EP elections, did not ‘attack’ the EU in his party political broadcasts, but rather castigat-ed Slovenian representatives in Brussels for not doing anything for their country [Haughton, Krašovec 2014]. In sum, it is possible to say that in the 2014 EP elections Slovenia faced some soft Euroscepticism [see Szczerbiak, Taggart 2001] based exclusively on economic and not ethno-nationalist arguments.

For many years, the EP elections have been described as elections where European issues are overshadowed by national concerns and issues [for example,

Raunio 2002; Seoane Perez, Lodge 2010], and notable exceptions to the rule have been countries with electorally significant Eurosceptical parties [Raunio 2002: 163]. But, it seems for the first time in 2009, the degree of ‘Europeanisation’ of the EP campaign was in general more visible, although it indeed varied considerably in the member countries, with Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Italy and Slovenia having markedly national campaign frameworks [Seoane Perez and Lodge 2010: 297-298]. As Krašovec and Lajh point out [2010], in Slovenia the first EP elections in 2004 also focused predominantly on national issues - this was very probably connected with parties’ interest or propaganda relative to the upcoming national parliamentary elections. In the 2014 campaign in Slovenia, in contrast to many other EU countries where European issues seemed to have been much more prominent in the campaigns for these EP elections than in previous elections, European issues were again marginal in the campaign (hardly surprising if we take into account Raunio’s observations on the importance of Eurosceptic parties in this regard), while Šabić et al. [2014] even concluded that the importance of European issues decreased in comparison with the 2009 EP elections.<sup>3</sup>

This prominence of domestic issues in 2014 was clearly connected with three events. First, a lot of time and energy in the (pre-)campaign period had been devoted to a referendum on the Amendments to the Law on Archives and Archival Material. The referendum was initiated by the SDS and supported by voters. In February-March 2014 a battle erupted over the date when it would be held. While the initiator strongly demanded it be held simultaneously with the EP elections, the government parties strongly opposed the idea, and both insisted on their stances due to their own political calculations. Second, as mentioned above, a battle over leadership in the PS culminated on the eve of the 2014 EP elections. Prime Minister Bratušek lost the party leadership elections and, as she had promised if such a scenario came to pass, resigned from the PM position at the beginning of May. After the resignation of the government, the main topic in Slovenia became the question of early parliamentary elections. Third, almost simultaneously with the leadership elections in the PS, the leader of the biggest opposition party (SDS) and former PM Janša was sent to prison. Already in 2013 he was found guilty of taking payments from a Finnish defence contractor during his 2004-2008 spell as Slovenia’s premier (Patria scandal), while at the end of April 2014 the verdict was upheld by the Higher Court (the Court of Appeal). These developments almost completely overshadowed the upcoming EP elections.

The focus of party campaigning was therefore logically oriented towards domestic issues and domestic problems that may<sup>4</sup> or may not be con-

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<sup>3</sup> According to van der Berge [2014: 4], this only happened in Slovenia and Cyprus.

<sup>4</sup> As Krašovec and Lajh [2010] found, even in 2009 some primarily EU-related topics (financial and economic crisis, employment and social protection in Europe, and EU enlargement) were put almost exclusively in a national perspective in Slovenia.

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nected to the EU. And when the EU was finally discussed, this was normally linked to the high salaries of MEPs, lucrative positions connected to the EU's political and bureaucratic milieus, and the (mal)distribution of EU funds. It is nevertheless fair to say that political actors competing for the job of MEP had few chances to properly present their programmatic standpoints due to the unavailability of media space and poor knowledge of citizens about the structure and functioning of the EU. The shortage of media coverage originated from the rigid normative framework of public television, which has to provide balanced coverage of election race, as well as the virtual absence of the campaign from the private networks as EP elections proved to attract relatively small numbers of viewers and thus also low ratings. The citizen knowledge gap, on the other hand, is related to the low presence of EU-related content in formal curriculums as well as only sporadic attempts to inform and educate citizens about the EU (e.g. EP information campaigns conducted prior to every EP election).

### ***Public Opinion Polls***

Several public opinion polls on the EP elections were conducted and their results presented to the public. First, there was a question about the voter turnout. According to the public opinion polls, approximately 30% of voters said they would vote for sure, while the same percentage of voters said they are very probably going to vote. Also, public opinion polls in the past predicted a relatively high turnout, but in both previous EP elections, the voter turnout was only 28%. In view of a decrease in the already relatively low level of trust in politics and political institutions in the last several years, it was estimated a turnout close to the 2004 and 2009 EP elections or lower would be more plausible. The second question was connected to the importance of a party list's leaders in voters' electoral decisions. As many as 70% of voters said they were going to make their electoral decision based on the leader of the candidate lists. Finally, data on the expected election results for individual parties with the predicted leaders of their lists was presented by several mass media and/or public opinion poll agencies. Actually, all of them predicted a victory for the SDS (when the EU Commissioner Potočnik at the beginning of March was mentioned as a potential candidate of the PS and/or a potential joint list of ALDE members, surveys showed this list would win), followed by the joint list of NSi and SLS. Soon after its decision to take part in the elections, the List of Igor Šoltes occupied the third position in the polls, while SD and DeSUS were also each expected to receive an MEP.

## ***Results of the EP Elections and Its Consequences***

As the public opinion polls suggested, the winner of the 2014 EP election was the SDS with three MEPs, followed by the joint list of NSi and the SLS with two MEPs (the leader of the SLS was elected by preference votes even though he was the last on the candidate list), while SD got one MEP. More importantly, in SD the party leader who insisted on heading the candidate list was heavily defeated by the current MEP Fajon – the latter received 11,681 preference votes, while the party leader received only 6,882 such votes. For the first time, SLS and DeSUS received an MEP, while MEP Kacin after two mandates did not get enough votes to enter the EP for the third time.

Four of the six MEPs who ran in the elections were re-elected. Looking from the European perspective, the EPP with five seats was the winner of the Slovenian EP elections, while S&D received one MEP. ALDE also received one MEP since MEP Vajgl again joined the ALDE even though in 2014 he was elected on DeSUS's list, whose programme is probably closer to the social democratic camp. But DeSUS has not been affiliated with any EU party, and therefore such a solution could be implemented. Although even right after the elections, it was not clear to which EU party/party group Šoltes from ‹his› Verjamem list would join, ALDE or EG, at the end the latter, with Šoltes becoming its first Slovenian MEP.

Looking at the EP election results, one can hardly avoid the famous second-order national elections conceptual framework for analysing elections, introduced by Reif and Schmitt [1980], even though it has been heavily debated throughout. For example, Koepke and Ringe [2006], but especially Clark and Rohrschneider [2009], have fiercely criticised the conceptual framework and its validity in the Central European countries. It seems the strongest criticism was directed at the observation by Reif and Schmitt on losses by government parties and the importance of the national electoral cycle in this regard. As noted by Cabada [2010], analysis of the 2009 EP elections in these countries clearly shows some peculiarities and deviations from the second-order national elections framework, but also confirms some of its elements. In Slovenia, all three EP elections were held at points in the national electoral cycle where governing parties are supposed to get, according to Koepke and Ringe [2006], the same or higher share of the vote in the EP elections as they did in the national ones – the 2004 and 2014 EP elections was held in the *later term*, while the 2009 EP election was held in the *honeymoon period*. Nevertheless, all three senior government coalition parties can be regarded as big losers of the EP elections – in 2004, the LDS lost 15% in the EP elections in relation to the previous national parliamentary election, in 2009 the SD lost 12% while in 2014 PS recorded even 22% lower support in the EP elections than in the previous national parliamentary elections. However,

the PS's defeat (as well as the SD's defeat in 2009 due to the economic and financial crisis and its unsuccessful handling of it) was somehow expected due to the fact that just before the EP elections, a battle over the leadership position between Jankovič and Bratušek led to the party's split (and the fall of the government). The party list was therefore headed by prominent non-partisan Eurosceptic economist Dr. Mencinger, who had to fight the campaign literally by himself, because seven other candidates found themselves in different political groups after the big schism in the PS, which led to their complete inactivity.

All government parties together in case of three EP elections held in Slovenia also recorded significantly lower support in the EP election than in the previous national parliamentary election (in the 2004 EP election, government parties altogether received only 36% in comparison to 53.3% of the vote in the 2000 national election; in the 2009 EP election, they received altogether 46.9%, while less than a year before, in the 2008 national elections, they received 52.4%; in the 2014 EP elections, the drop in support for government parties altogether was dramatic since they received only 23.9% in comparison with 54.3% in the 2011 national elections). Taking all this data into account, it is possible even after the 2014 EP elections to agree with Cabada [2010] that Slovenia represents the greatest deviation from the second-order national election framework among CEE countries in this respect.

Table 3. Results of the 2009 and 2014 EP Elections in Slovenia

PARTY	2009			2014		
	Votes (%)	Seats	EP Seats (%)	Votes (%)	Seats	EP Seats (%)
Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	26.6	2(3)*	0.4	24.8	3	0.4
<i>Social Democrats (SD)</i>	18.4	2	0.3	8.1	1	0.1
New Slovenia–Christian Democrats (NSi)	16.5	1	0.1	16.6**	2**	0.2
Slovenian People's Party (SLS)	3.6	0	0	16.6**	2**	0.2
I Believe - List of Igor Šoltes	/	/	/	10.3	1	0.1
<i>Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS)</i>	7.2	0	0	8.1	1	0.1
<b>Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)</b>	11.5	1	0.1	/	0	0
<b>Zares</b>	9.8	1	0.1	0.9	0	0
<i>Positive Slovenia (PS)</i>	/	/	/	6.6	0	0
United Left Coalition (ZL)	/	/	/	5.5	0	0
<i>Civic List (DL)</i>	/	/	/	1.1	0	0
Others		0			0	

\*After ratification of the Lisbon treaty, Slovenia received another MEP and according to the EP election results SDS got another MEP

\*\* NSi and SLS in 2014 formed a joint list of candidates

**Bold:** Government parties at the time of the 2009 EP elections

*Italic:* Government parties at the time of the 2014 EP elections

Last but not least, Slovenia with a 24.5% voter turnout (in both the previous EP elections it recorded the same, namely 28.3%) had one of the lowest turnouts in the EU. Although the *less-at-stake* argument [Reif, Schmitt 1980] was offered to explain low(er) turnout for a long time, this can no longer be the case since the EP's powers have been progressively increased while turnout remained somewhat disappointing [Lodge 2010]. As Lodge [2010: 19] establishes, dissipating national electoral resources, enthusiasm and funding for the election of MEPs remained a low priority for top-level politicians, party activists and political journalists. Such characteristics have been obvious in all Slovenian EP elections so far [see Krašovec ed. 2005; Kustec Lipicer ed. 2005; Krašovec ed. 2010; Krašovec, Lajh 2010; Krašovec, Malčič 2014; Haughton, Krašovec 2014].

When speaking about the consequences of the EP elections for the national arena, several things can be mentioned. First, even though EP elections are predominantly seen as *second-order elections*, they were fatal for three party leaders; two leaders of government parties, SD's Dr. Lukšič and CL's Dr. Virant resigned from their leadership positions due the bad results of their parties. In both cases, the EP election results were conclusive proof that due to declining public support, two government parties had 'to deal' with their unpopular leaders before the highly important race in July 2014 – early national parliamentary elections. Non-parliamentary Zares's leader P. Gantar resigned. Second, the fact that conservatives (SDS and joint list of NSi and SLS) received 'only' 41.1% of the votes but five MEPs (62.5% of all Slovenian MEPs), together with the good experience with the NSi-SLS joint list and the fiasco of the ALDE members, on the other hand, who could not agree upon a joint list triggered many statements in the centre-left camp on the need to overcome divisions to fight the much more united conservative camp in the upcoming national parliamentary elections. The need to prepare a joint list even became a kind of slogan. The result can be best described by quoting Shakespeare's words - *much ado about nothing* since only the SD and Solidarity found enough common ground to form a joint candidate list under the SD's name, while the completely marginalised Zares and LDS ran under the banner of the Alliance of Alenka Bratušek. Third, even though the big majority of votes were assigned to established parties, the EP elections empirically confirmed that voters indeed (still) long for new parties and faces in politics – not only Dr. Šoltes with his List (10.3%), but also the United Left (5.5%), the 'provocative experiment' Dream Job (3.5%) and the Pirate Party (2.5% confirmed this (in the national parliamentary elections the newcomer Party of Miro Cerar convincingly won the elections with 34.5%, while UL received 6%). Fourth, the EP elections were a good predictor or even confirmation of the already expected failure of government parties in the national parliamentary elections – PS with only 3% (as well as the PM's Alliance of Alenka Bratušek formed after the schism with

only 4.4%), with SD (6%) and CL (0.6%) where even the new (acting) leaders could not prevent their parties from suffering a big defeat. Only one government party, DeSUS, recorded better results. Fifth, European success on the other hand <beheaded> the SLS and the new Šoltes party (I Believe), whose leaders felt very comfortable with their MEP positions and both only under certain pressures decided to run in the national elections - and lost. SLS as a continually parliamentary party since the first multiparty elections in 1990 did not reach the threshold, while I Believe proved to be a mayfly completely dependent on its leader (it received only 0.8% on the national elections).

Due to all the described characteristics, it is possible to agree with Haughton and Krašovec [2014] that the “EP elections were a dress rehearsal for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The stage was set, the parties were donning their costumes and new actors were frantically learning their lines, albeit no one was quite sure when the performance would begin”.

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