

Chapter 12

Slovak vote in the EP election in broader context of the EU perception

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Abstract

Slovak citizens launched themselves onto the European scene with extremely low turnout - only 17% of eligible voters participated in the selection of 14 Slovak EP members. On the other hand, the election was mainly successful for pro-European coalition parties, in spite of their mid-term unpopularity, but not for parties which tried to mobilize the voters by appealing to anti-EU sentiments. This means that the trend in Slovakia did not follow the prevailing EU pattern by strengthening the opposition and voting for smaller euro-sceptical or anti-EU parties. Euro-phobes such as communists or nationalists failed completely. More mobilized have been voters who stand for Europe/European union, not only as the winners of EU integration. The traditionally better mobilized national populist parties were not motivated by the idea of Europe. The issue has lower salience for them and they perceive it ambivalently. This differential mobilization led to the success of the coalition parties.

The voting pattern for the EP election in Slovakia represents one case study among 8 post-communist countries that joined the Union in 2004. What differentiates the newcomers from the established EU15 and how the second-order model works in the new member states has been analyzed by Marsh

(2005) and Schmitt (2005)? My paper will compare Slovakia with other EU nations in term of EU membership perception and the impact of EU issues on party competition before and after the accession.

I. EU–issue in domestic politics – short overview

Delayed and weak pre-accession public debate

The public and political debate about EU integration was delayed in Slovakia compared to other Visegrad 4 countries. This was mainly because the EU-discourse was overshadowed by debates about the quality/nature of democracy in Slovakia. Although European issues were not absent from the debate before the autumn of 1998, they took a back seat to a domestic conflict over the government's illiberal ruling style. During this period the European dimension mattered because it provided external validation (or lack of it) for the policies of both government and opposition. The broad (anti-Mečiar) coalition government (1998-2002) managed to eliminate doubts about the political stability of Slovakia, and this resulted in technical issues about the accession process and the closing of the negotiation chapters. The black-or-white question "yes or no" was replaced with the question "when" would Slovakia join the EU.

The absence, at the level of both the political elite and the general public, of a broader discussion on the EU also had more general causes - in post communist countries EU membership has been perceived as being an ultimate objective which has no alternative. Between 1998 and 2002, the attitude of Slovakia's political and social elite toward European issues could be described as "Euro-determinism" or "consensus without discussion", which made a genuine public debate virtually impossible. It is worth stressing that during this period, indeed from the mid-1990s onwards, virtually all political parties advocated entry and all governments included it in their declared programmes. HZDS declared its belief in EU membership and Mečiar himself submitted Slovakia's application. In the other V4

countries politicians such as Klaus, Orban and, to a lesser extent, Lepper were prominent critics of the EU, but no one took a similar position in Slovakia. Euroscepticism has, therefore, not been explicitly put before the electorate.

Parliamentary Election 2002

Slovakia successfully negotiated EU membership, catching up with the neighbors, and in 2002 stood in front of the EU door. There was one barrier to overcome – the parliamentary election to be held in September 2002. This election was not as critical as that in 1998 had been, but still there was a question mark – what would happen if Mečiar managed a comeback? The EU and NATO representatives, as well as foreign diplomats, argued that in such a case Slovakia might miss the “integration train”. The coalition parties – and above all the Dzurinda’s Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU) - campaigned for Slovakia’s euro-Atlantic integration. Maintaining the course of Slovakia’s foreign policy was extremely important to SDKÚ voters [and leading party figures]; so it was a priority stressed by the party. Furthermore, the SDKU wanted to position itself as the strongest guarantor of integration as well as to present itself as the party which had made the “catching up process” not only possible and but smooth. The Smer party positioned itself between the coalition and the opposition, utilizing the dominant political conflict. Its appeal to voters was based on claims of novelty, modernity and sober pragmatism, as well as on criticizing and blaming the established parties. The party took a pro-EU position but wanted to distance itself from the coalition’s integration effort: its bottom line was integration yes, but not at all costs. All in all the EU issue was a ‘valence issue’.

EU accession referendum 2003

Positive public perception of EU membership provided ideal conditions for the straightforward course of the euro-referendum. It turned out that the main problem was not the final outcome, but ensuring sufficient voter participation

(there is a 50% turnout quorum in Slovakia), and, in consequence, the validity of the plebiscite. Eventually, turnout reached 52% of eligible voters, which was less than in Poland and the Czech Republic, but more than in Hungary. The “yes” to Slovakia’s EU membership was more than resounding, as 92% of those voters who came to polling stations endorsed the country’s integration¹.

The experience of other candidates confirmed that in countries where public debates lacked articulated opposition to EU integration, and where public support for integration was high in the long term but also relatively shallow and impersonal, total voter participation in the euro-referendum was lower, and the share of “no” votes was negligible. Other factors that caused low interest in the referendum that were specific to Slovakia included previous negative experience with referenda in Slovakia, generally critical perceptions of recent societal developments, of the use of non-participation to demonstrate disapproval of government policies, the assumption that the result would be positive, and inadequate mobilization activities by political parties. Last but not least, the lackluster campaign reflected the non-competitive nature of the issue, poor structure, and the excessively general nature of the public debate.

II. European Parliament election – parallels and differences with the second-order-election model

On May 1, 2004, Slovakia became a fully-fledged member of the European Union. The first “test” of new EU citizens came shortly after this accession in form of the election for members of the European Parliament in 25 EU member states. The majority of new member states witnessed an extremely low turnout in their first EP election. Slovak citizens introduced themselves onto the European scene with critically low turnout - only 16.97 % of eligible voters came to cast their vote and to choose 14 EP members. This is an absolute “record” not only in the 2004 EP election, but also in the history of

European Parliamentary elections. Voter participation under 30% was also recorded in Poland (20.5%), Estonia (26.8%), Slovenia (28.3%), and in the Czech Republic (28.3%). This contrasted with very high participation in Belgium (90.8%) and Luxembourg (89.0%), who both have compulsory voting. The average participation across the EU 25 was 45.7%; the range stretches from over 90% to less than 17 %.

Since the first election to the European Parliament in 1979 a lot of comparative electoral studies have been developed to describe the main differences between this ‘second-order election’ and other types of elections. The EP election differs from ‘first-order’ elections mostly in:

- lower participation
- loss of government parties
- loss of big parties.²

Let us examine the first EP election in Slovakia from this perspective.

Table 1: Results of EP election in Slovakia

Political party	% of valid votes	EP seats	% vote in 2002 election
Government parties			
Slovak Democratic and Christian Coalition (SDKÚ)	17.09	3	15.09
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	16.19	3	8.25
Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	13.24	2	11.06
Alliance of a New Citizen (ANO)	4.65	0	8.01
Total government parties	51.20	8	42.52
Opposition Parties			
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	17.04	3	19.50
SMER	16.89	3	13.46
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	4.54	0	6.32
Total opposition parties	38.46	6	39.29
Extra-parliamentary/breakaway parties			
Free Forum (SF)	3.25	0	-
Coalition Slovak National Party / Real Slovak National Party (SNS/PSNS)	2.01	0	3.65/3.32
Coalition Movement for Democracy/People's Union (HZD/EÚ)	1.69	0	3.28/-
Civic Conservative Party (OKS)	1.00	0	0.32
Other (6 parties)	2.35	0	7.60
Total parties not elected to the parliament in 2002	10.32	0	18.19

Source: Statistical Office of the SR, see also Henderson 2004: 10.

The results of the EP elections in Slovakia do not comply with two out of three above-mentioned differences associated with European elections in general. Eight candidates divided between three government parties, namely the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK), won seats in the European Parliament. In general, the most successful party was the SDKÚ with 17.09% of votes and three out of 14 mandates in the EP. More than 16% of voters voted for the KDH, which gained three seats in the EP. The KDH recorded their best election result since the 1992 parliamentary elections. The SMK won 13% of the popular vote and gained two seats in the EP. In total the ruling coalition parties received more votes than in the parliamentary elections of 2002. All MEPs from the ruling coalition became members of the EPP-ED group in the EP. In total the opposition parties received 38.5% of the popular vote (the KSS failed to win the 5% of votes necessary for representation) and six seats in the EP, three seats for Smer and three seats for the ĽS-HZDS.

Smaller parties were not successful; despite expectations, two parliamentary parties, namely the Alliance of New Citizens (ANO) and the opposition Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), did not manage to exceed the required 5% of the popular vote. The newly unified coalition of the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Real Slovak National Party (PSNS) received only a tiny proportion of the voter support both parties usually receive in national elections.

In terms of the election results it should be mentioned that, unlike what happened in many other EU member states, the elections to the European Parliament in Slovakia were successful for pro-European ruling coalition parties rather than for the parties mobilizing voters through EU sceptical or EU critical attitudes. Yet given the very low turnout it is not possible to draw any conclusions or to make any prognosis for other elections from the electoral behavior of voters.

As shown by the studies carried out in the old EU member states, the voters are less and less partisan and more and more often they decide how to vote at each type of elections separately, and therefore also often vote for different political parties at different elections. Based on the results of the first EP elections and very low voter turnout in Slovakia one can say that voting decision was to a large extent consistent with retrospectively declared behavior in the parliamentary elections of 2002 (in case of Smer, the SMK and the KDH more than 85% voted identically, in case of the HZDS it was 75%, and in case of the SDKÚ 69%). These findings also indicate that the election results were determined mainly by very differentiated voter turnout which was not based on the difference between the rural and urban environments, but on the mobilizing strength of the issue of the EU (the SDKÚ) and the combination of loyalty and significance of the subject (the KDH).

Table 2: Participation in the EP election – breakdown by party preferences

	Did participate	Did not participate
SDKÚ	42.9	57.1
KDH	42.4	57.6
SMK	29.2	70.8
ES-HZDS	26.0	74.0
ANO	24.1	75.9
SNS	17.9	82.1
SMER	14.2	85.8
KSS	13.0	87.0

Source: EES post-election survey June 2004 – Slovakia

Empirical data prove the general assumption that the voters' perception was focused more on national politics than on the European level. More than 40% of the respondents who did not vote replied that they "do not trust the politicians, they feel election fatigue and they are disconcerted by national politics". Only 12% gave reasons specifically related to European politics or institutions and 15% were not sufficiently familiar with the candidates, party manifestos etc. Voters' indifference also resulted from lack of salience of the European agenda in public debate in Slovakia and from lack of interest on

the part of political parties³ and the media. This fact became apparent in feeble election competition and an insufficiently visible campaign. Although nearly 12% of respondents justified their absence from the elections by citing specific objections to the EU, this was not, in general, the main reason. The Slovak public is typically supportive of EU membership and evaluates its impact positively, the image of the European Union is also positive among the Slovak public.

Table 3 “Could you tell me, why you did not take part in this election?” (Open-ended question, one response possible, filter question n= 859) (%)

Not interested in the election, politics, election fatigue	22
Disillusion, frustration with politics, “it does not matter, makes no sense”, distrust of politicians in general	19
“Objective” reasons - being abroad, ill, etc.	19
Missing information about the candidates, weak campaign, lack of information	15
EU or EP specific critique („nothing will change”, “EP is too distant”, “I do not care about the EU”, “it does not matter which useless individual will represent us”, “EU does not help us”.....)	12
I did not want to go (without giving any reason)	1
“Sunday” (inappropriate day)	1
Other reasons	3
DK	10

Source: EES post election survey June 2004 – Slovakia

One of the main reasons for low voter participation was the absence of controversial issues, and because of that the absence of mobilizing debate. Paradoxically, the issue of the European elections became controversial only after the elections, when the politicians looked for reasons for low turnout. Compared to previous (especially parliamentary) elections, the Euro-elections were also influenced by the absence of fear of losing: the voters were not emotionally mobilized by the fear that the direction in which the country was heading would change.

In general we can state that the pattern of voter mobilization and voting decision in EP elections differs from that in national elections. The most motivated were voters for whom the EU means something (in affective rather

than simply instrumental terms). Traditionally loyal supporters of opposition parties (especially the HZDS and the KSS) were not mobilized for the European elections. They are not familiar with this issue and they perceive Slovakia's EU membership in a negative or an ambivalent way, rather than in a positive one. The overall victory of the ruling coalition resulted in part from this distribution of interest in the election. The coalition won the elections despite suffering *mid-term unpopularity*. However, those who voted for government parties (in particular the SDKÚ) are highly appreciative of the country's EU membership and the subject of European integration is mobilizing for them.

Analysis of *European Election Study*⁴ data shows that the eight post-communist new member states vary in many aspects from examined and described models of electoral behavior in the countries of the previous EU 15. First of all, the "mid-term dissatisfaction" model, according to which the ruling parties in Euro-elections are particularly likely to lose their support when these are held in the middle of a national election cycle, cannot be applied in general. As for eight new member states, no unifying pattern of election gains and losses depending on election cycle emerged. The dispersion of cases and fluctuations was much larger than within former EU 15 (Marsh, 2005). Provided that the model also includes voter participation, which reached an average of 32% in eight new member states compared to 57 % in other EU countries⁵, one may assume that abstaining from voting during these elections expresses voters' dissatisfaction with government performance, especially when there is a lack of EU-sceptical opposition political parties.

Similarly, the findings did not confirm that larger parties do worse and smaller parties do better in Euro-elections. On the other hand, no EU 15 country has experienced such massive losses and gains in voter support as some new member states. As an example we can cite the Czech Republic and the slide in voter support for the ruling ČSSD from 30% in parliamentary

elections to 9% in Euro-elections, or Poland, where the voter support for the SDL-UP dropped from 41% to 9%. On the other hand, the Latvian party TB/LNKK received 30% of votes compared to 5% in the previous parliamentary elections and the support for Moodukad party in Estonia increased from 7% to 37% of all votes. Similarly, all the most significant cases of significant losses of votes have occurred in post-communist countries (Marsh, 2005:155).

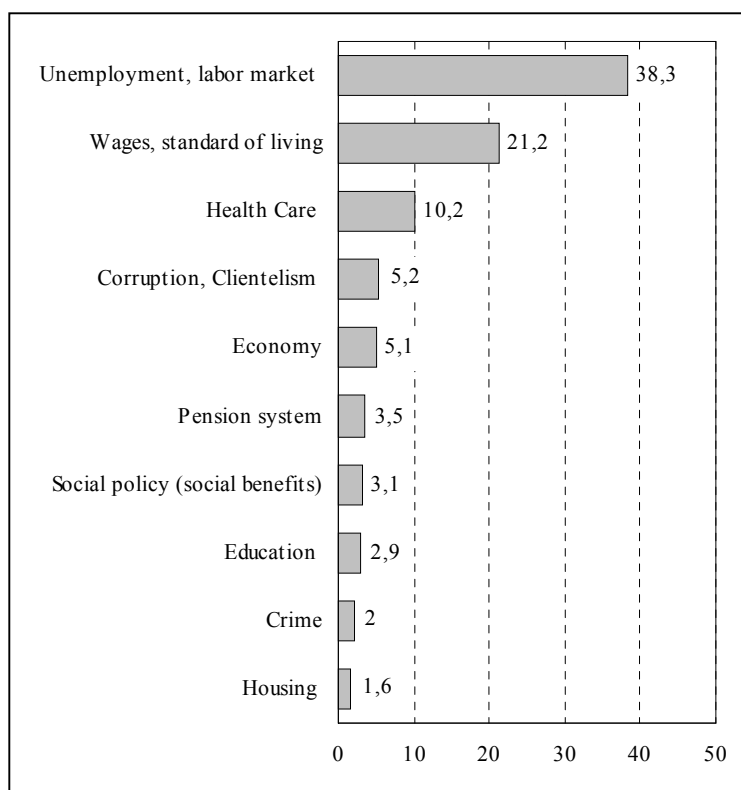
Slovakia did not see such dramatic changes in its election results. The results ranged from + 7.94 percentage point (the KDH) to 3.36 percentage point (the ANO). According to the findings of the survey conducted immediately after the EP elections, voting in Euro-elections was to a large extent consistent with voting in national elections. We may therefore state that Slovakia does not copy the model for new EU Members described by Egmond (2005), according to which changes in results of Euro-elections are based on election fluctuations rather than on differentiated voter turnout. In Slovakia it was a differentiated voter turnout that resulted in different results compared to the previous parliamentary elections. The main reason for an exceptionally low voter turnout in Slovakia's first Euro-elections can be considered to be the absence of controversial issues, and therefore the absence of mobilizing debate.

III. Social climate - most urgent problems in the national vs. EU level perspective

In Slovakia, as any other transformation country, the hierarchy of urgent social problems is dominated by unemployment, followed by wages, low standard of living and the health care system (Graph 1). Though popular acceptance of the historical changes that have occurred since November 1989 increased slightly in 2004 (Bútorová-Gyárfášová-Velšic, 2005), the general perception of the economic and social situation remains relatively pessimistic. These trends are accompanied by a gradual deepening in

differences of opinion among various socio-demographic and political groupings. In fact regional disparities are deep and the differences are becoming even sharper due to the implementation of liberal reforms. Residents of the Bratislava region seem well aware of their better opportunities, while residents of eastern parts of the country display a very strong feeling of deprivation. Generally, the frustration of citizens tends to increase from west to east.

Graph 1: “Which of the issues you have specified do you consider most crucial, most significant? (Specify just one)”



Source: EES post-election survey June 2004 – Slovakia

Who is dealing and should deal with the most pressing problems? According to the respondents, urgent social problems are dealt with mainly at national, not regional or European level (Table 4). Even when respondents think that

the EU should find a solution, the national level is seen as the key for dealing with the problems.

Displeasure with the economic and social situation most often turns against the Government. The public often assesses the Government's performance from the perspective of their own wallet. In Slovakia, critical attitudes prevail – almost 2/3 disagree with that what the Government has done so far. The Government's job was positively evaluated by just 22% of the respondents.

Table 4 “In your opinion today, the most significant issue is mainly dealt with at regional, state-wide or European level vs. the issue should be dealt with at regional, state-wide or European level?”

	The issue is dealt:			The issue should be dealt:		
	regional	state-wide	European	regional	state-wide	European
Unemployment, labor market	17	44	14	23	46	19
Wages, standard of living	11	48	9	16	53	18
Health care	7	68	5	17	60	11
Corruption	7	46	22	9	52	28
Economy	12	58	14	12	50	29
Pension system	8	61	8	17	53	19
Social benefits	16	59	13	13	55	32
Education	31	38	14	3	57	30

Note: Bold = significant shifts between “is“ and “should be“. Source: EES post-election survey June 2004 – Slovakia

IV. Satisfied but indifferent - some paradoxes of the EU membership's perception

Based on several empirical surveys we can say that Slovaks are satisfied and optimistic regarding their country's EU membership.⁶ Approximately half a year after Slovakia joined the EU, its citizens continued to be enthusiastic about the move; nearly four out of five respondents (79%) approved of it (Bútorová – Gyárfášová – Velšic, 2005, p. 268). In the months that followed, support increased even further. A survey conducted shortly before the first

anniversary of Slovakia's EU accession put the share of supporters at 83%, the highest level among all Visegrad Four (V4) countries.⁷ Similarly, a survey conducted by the MVK agency showed that one year after Slovakia's EU accession, 73% of Slovak citizens viewed it as the right move.⁸

The findings of surveys by the FOCUS agency provide a more structured overview of Slovaks' positive and negative expectations before their country's EU accession, and the extent to which these expectations were met after the first year of EU membership. The findings show that after one year in the EU, Slovaks believed that their country was really getting four out of the five most widely expected benefits of EU membership. On the other hand, three out of the five most widely expected fears had not come true to the extent expected before EU accession (see Tables).

However, we can observe certain ambivalence towards the new phenomenon that is most frequently related to EU accession. For example, free movement is seen on the one hand as providing new opportunities for travel and work abroad, and on the other as threatening a brain drain and the influx of a cheap labor force to the labor market. 48% of respondents in April 2004 expected more opportunities to work abroad, while in May 2005 59% of respondents said these opportunities really existed. On the other hand, 52% of respondents in April 2004 feared the use of cheap labor in Slovakia, while in May 2005 the figure was 46%. Increased bureaucracy is the only area where Slovaks' fears have worsened significantly over the past year.

Table 5 “What benefits do you expect from Slovakia’s EU membership?” (April 2004, %) “What benefits is Slovakia getting from its EU membership?” (May 2005, %)

	April 2004	May 2005	Trend
Opportunities to work abroad	48	59	↑
Ability to travel without passport/visa	40	46	↑
Better chances for young people	44	40	↓
Arrival of foreign investors, creation of new jobs	28	34	↑
Chances to draw financial aid from EU funds	20	24	↑
Acceptance of Slovakia in Europe and in the world	12	14	↑
Increased competition	9	10	↑
Improved standard of living for Slovak citizens	19	8	↓
Better chances for domestic producers to export to EU markets	13	8	↓
Improved security for Slovakia	8	8	
Stronger democracy	7	7	
Harmonization of Slovak legislation with EU legislation	7	3	↓

Source: FOCUS, 2004, 2005.

So, one may conclude that Slovaks are generally happy when looking back at the first year of their country’s EU membership. This has to do with several circumstances. Most importantly, the negative scenarios that foretold a dramatic increase in prices of foodstuffs, services and other commodities did not come true. Macroeconomic data even indicated an improvement in 2004 against the previous year. Slovakia recorded the highest GDP growth of all V4 countries; real wages saw a moderate increase; inflation remained low and some consumer prices (e.g. foodstuffs or clothes) even showed a certain decline. Of course, this favorable macroeconomic development was not brought about solely by Slovakia’s EU membership.

Table 6 “What negatives do you expect from Slovakia’s EU membership?” (April 2004, %) “What are the negatives of Slovakia’s EU membership?” (May 2005, %)

	April 2004	May 2005	Trend
Use of cheap labor in Slovakia	52	46	↓
Departure of professionals and young people abroad (brain drain)	43	37	↓
Lower standard of living for Slovak citizens	39	33	↓
Influx of products from other EU member states to our market	27	29	↑
Reduced security for Slovakia	21	23	↑
Increased bureaucracy	15	23	↑
Inflow of foreigners from other EU member states	24	17	↓
Adoption of “Western” lifestyle	13	16	↑
Obligation to adhere to EU laws, directives and guidelines	10	16	↑
Surrender of certain decision-making powers – loss of independence	15	15	
Increased unemployment	9	12	↑
Increased competition	7	6	↓

Source: FOCUS, 2004, 2005.

However, the high public support for EU membership is driven not only by economic and social grounds but also by the conviction that Slovakia and its citizens have obtained a ticket into a solid and prestigious club in terms of more social sensitivity, better prospects for the future, more democracy and more tolerance towards minorities. Of course free movement, Europe without borders and a final farewell to Yalta play important roles as well.

Our last but not least factor has to do with the “cautious optimism” of Slovak citizens’ pre-accession expectations: first, people mostly expected advantages for the country as a whole, rather than for themselves; second, they fixed their positive expectations to rather distant time horizons.

As in other countries, support is among younger, better-educated, urban dwellers.

Table 7: Attitudes towards EU membership – breakdown by demographics and party preference

	Good thing	Neither good nor bad	Bad thing
AGE			
18 - 24	50.8	40.1	5.6
25 - 34	39.2	44.3	6.1
35 - 44	38.8	46.6	8.3
45 - 54	31.8	51.3	10.8
55 - 59	17.5	55.6	15.9
60 and more	22.9	56.2	10.5
EDUCATION			
Elementary	26.4	50.6	13.8
Vocational	32.3	48.7	8.0
Secondary (high school)	37.9	50.7	7.0
University	57.4	34.3	3.7
PROFESSION			
Unqualified workers	18.8	50.0	20.8
Qualified workers	34.8	52.0	7.8
Executive professionals	43.5	48.3	4.8
Creative professionals	62.3	30.4	2.9
Entrepreneurs	48.8	32.1	9.5
Pensioners	21.7	54.8	12.6
Student	60.0	33.8	4.6
In the home, maternity leave	44.2	44.2	0.0
Unemployed	23.3	57.0	9.3
PARTY PREFERENCE			
ANO	55.2	37.9	6.9
KDH	51.7	38.3	3.3
KSS	17.9	46.4	19.6
ES-HZDS	20.6	56.9	11.8
SDKÚ	75.0	20.8	4.2
SMER	40.0	50.0	5.5
SMK	46.7	44.0	1.3
SNS (Slovak National Party)	34.5	41.4	17.2
Non-voters	21.9	59.4	10.4
Undecided voters	44.1	36.9	9.0
Slovak average population	35.3	48.4	8.5

Note: bold = significant deviations from the average population. Source: EES post-election survey June 2004 – Slovakia

The differences among social groups are deep, how the main gap is according to the party orientation having the constituencies of the center right coalition parties strongly on the “yes” side and the extreme left (Communist party) on the other (Table 7).

The majority of the Slovak public is in favor of a continuing integration process. Only a small percentage thinks that, “integration has already gone too far”. The average reached 5.90 and the median 5.48.

Micro- macro level gap

Slovaks are prevailingly optimistic when it comes to the possible impacts of their country’s EU membership. Less than one in seven Slovak citizens expect more disadvantages for Slovakia or their particular region of residence during the first two or three years of EU membership (13% and 14%, respectively). The share of those who expect some sort of detriment in their personal lives is slightly higher, but at 21% it still represents a minority (see Table 1). When anticipating the implications of their country’s EU membership, the Slovaks stick to the pre-accession model of expectations, i.e. more advantages for the nation as a whole, fewer for me and my family.

Table 8 “Do you believe that Slovakia’s EU membership in the next two or three years will bring more benefits or more costs to the following subjects?” (%)

	To Slovakia	To your region	To you and your family
More benefits	45	36	26
Equally many benefits and costs	36	41	45
More costs	13	14	21
Don’t know	6	9	8

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, November 2004.

Representation vs. participation

Despite the extremely low turnout, nine out of ten respondents taking part in the post-election survey said it was good that “Slovak citizens have their representatives in the European Parliament” (Gyárfašová 2005, p. 82). the Slovaks’ perception of their country’s EU membership may therefore be described as representation without participation. In respect of the EP election, high trust to the European Parliament combined with unusually low turnout in all new member states, although the gap was deepest in Slovakia.

Other indicators also show that in Slovakian perception of the EU lower awareness and a lower level of knowledge is combined with higher than average verbal support. A special Barometer focused on public perception of the EU constitutional treaty shows that Slovak respondents are placed in the middle in the “knowledge test”. On the other hand, as was the case for public

support for the European constitution, the document was endorsed by 61% and turned down by 11% of Slovaks, while the average ratio in the EU-25 was 49% to 16%. The highest public support for the European constitution was recorded in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, followed by Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia. On the opposite pole were Great Britain, Cyprus, Sweden and Ireland, where public support did not exceed 30%. So in Slovakia, an average knowledge of the European constitution's actual content was combined with above-average support for its adoption (The Future Constitutional Treaty, 2005, pp. 7-15).

Conclusion

Slovakia "introduced" itself onto the European scene by its low participation level in the elections for the European Parliament. The reason for that is not that there are reservations about the EU or European politics. The opposite is the case - the Slovak public is satisfied with EU membership and perceives the related impacts as positive. We can say that this lack of interest is based on **indifference and unconcern and not on dissatisfaction or even protest against membership**. Differential mobilization has shown that the salience of EU membership and party loyalty were the most relevant motivations to vote.

The full membership in the EU was a strategic priority not just for the political elites - since the prevailing majority of Slovakia's citizens had desired it. The first months of this "dream come true" show that the pre-accession adaptation definitely does not represent a closed chapter, but rather that the process will be dynamic and non-linear. The Slovak public faces new challenges and the country's increased openness will play an increasingly significant role. From the view point of our future, it would be desirable if the Slovak public would adopt a more active attitude towards European issues now they are within the European Union, even at the price of criticising certain aspects of the EU membership. After two years of

membership, the EU issue is less salient than it was before May 1, 2004 but probably also less salient than it will be in the future, when EU will be perceived as something more related to everyday life.

Notes

¹ In the accession referenda only in two of eight new EU members from CEE a majority of the entire electorate came out to support EU membership: 58% of the electorate in Lithuania and 54% in Slovenia. In Slovakia despite of the high „yes vote voters”, the “yes electorate” represented 48% (see: Mudde, Cas: EU Accession and a New Populist Center-Periphery Cleavage in Central and Eastern Europe. Center for European Studies CEE, Working Paper No. 62, p. 2.

² See also Hermann Schmitt (2005) The European Parliament Election of June 2004: Still Second-order? (Paper available at www.europeanelection.net)

³ On average, political parties spent one tenth of the amount of money on campaigns for EP elections than they did for national elections (Bilčík, 2004: 446).

⁴ Home page of the project European Election Study: www.europeanelection.net

⁵ 17 EU member states excluding new members from Central and Eastern Europe

⁶ Positive attitude of Slovaks toward European integration was confirmed by the Eurobarometer survey in fall 2004, which was the first such survey following the May enlargement. The survey showed that the Slovaks enjoy being part of the Union and that they trust it: 57 percent of respondents said EU membership was “a good thing” (the average for new member states was 50%) and 62% connected it with benefits (the average for new member states was 54%). The Slovaks also showed a high level of trust toward EU institutions; for instance 70% of respondents said they trusted the European Parliament, which placed Slovakia second among all EU member states (*Eurobarometer*, fall 2004).

⁷ Opinions of V4 Citizens Regarding their Countries' EU Membership, a FOCUS press release from April 27, 2005; www.focus-research.sk.

⁸ A public opinion poll for the *Sme* daily conducted by the MVK agency between March 17 and 23, 2005, on a representative sample of 1,200 respondents (quoted according to *Sme*, April 30, 2005, p. 4).

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