

EU-28 WATCH



No. 10
July 2014

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-28Watch.org

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On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

The EU-28 Watch No. 10 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the *"Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung"*, and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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Malta

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1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament elections*Election campaign: civil unions, energy prices and unemployment*

National issues dominated the campaign. The political debate had two main adversaries, the Nationalist Party (NP), in opposition since losing the March 2013 election and the governing Labour Party (LP). Since 1966, these have been the only two parties in the national parliament and have captured all seats in the three European parliamentary elections held since 2004. The NP focused on governance issues and unemployment. It criticised the government for not keeping its electoral promises. The LP has defended its record and kept up the momentum since the last national election by reducing energy prices to the benefit of consumers and passing the Civil Unions Act, which represented a triumph for the LGBT community. This law once again threw the NP into turmoil. For the European election the NP urged voters to show government ‘the yellow card’, but then failed to persuade them to shift their allegiances. Indeed the European election result replicated that of the national election held in March 2013 which saw the LP outpace its rival by around 36,000 votes or 11.5 percent of the valid votes cast and a nine seat parliamentary majority. In the 2014 European election, the LP obtained 53.4 percent to the NP’s 40.02 percent although the two parties elected three MEPs each.

Alternattiva Demokratika (AD), the green party, performed very well in the campaign and was the party which stuck most to European issues. However, its share of the vote was only about 3 percent.

No role for Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism did not play a major role in the campaign and Alleanza Bidla, the only Eurosceptic Party which contested the election secured a mere 0.08 percent of the vote.

Declining, but high turnout

In 2014, voter turnout declined to 74.8 percent from 78.8 percent in 2009 – which had itself declined from 82.4 percent in 2004. There is a declining trend in turnout even if it is still much higher than the EU average. This decline is due to a number of factors including: the irrelevance of European issues during the campaign, voter fatigue since campaigning started almost immediately after the 2013 election, indifference, ‘normal’ voter absenteeism, the fact that both main parties support membership and the fact that the election would not change the government. The popularity of the LP and its comfortable majority in the national parliament may also have persuaded some voters into thinking that the European election was “worthless” since it would not alter power configurations.

Links:

- Jurgen Balzan, [Voter Lethargy Hits Malta Too](#), Malta Today, 25 May 2014.
- Marcello Carammia and Roderick Pace, [Malta: Hidden Change?](#), 9 June 2014.

- Malta Today, [Sant tells voters 'abstention is PN vote'](#), 15 May 2014.

2. The EU's Neighbourhood

Good relations with Russia, but criticism of its Ukraine policy

The government has criticised Russia's annexation of Crimea and urged for a peacefully negotiated solution of the conflict. This view is shared by the opposition. The 'mainstream' view is that it is important for the EU to maintain good relations with Russia.

Getting Russia involved in EaP negotiations

EU relations with the Eastern Partnership countries have to be managed better. The Foreign Minister, Dr George Vella, remarked in an interview that it was important to involve Russia during EU negotiations of association agreements with Eastern Partnership countries such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Furthermore, Dr Vella stated that the European Union was too naive in thinking that they could engage the European neighbourhood countries and offer Association Agreements, deep and comprehensive free trade areas, and hoping that Russia would not react.

Divided opinions on Turkey's EU accession

The last survey of public opinion on Turkey's membership, held by Eurobarometer in 2006, shows the Maltese split with 35 percent in favour of Turkey's accession, 31 percent against and the rest undecided. Government and the opposition support Turkey's membership, although within the political parties, there are contrary opinions. Turkey's EU membership does not command a lot of public interest.

As far as other neighbourhood issues are concerned, there is obviously a strong preoccupation with developments in the Mediterranean particularly the situation in Libya, the civil war in Syria and now in Iraq. These can also become sources of new migratory pressures in the Mediterranean, and Malta believes that the EU is not being sufficiently helpful in dealing with this phenomenon. During the European campaigns in 2004, 2009 and 2014, immigration topped people's concerns in Malta.

Links:

- Bianca Caruana, [Malta Supports Turkey's Membership](#), Malta Today, 12 April 2012.
- Debating Europe, [Is the EU partly to blame for the crisis in the Ukraine?](#), 8 April 2014.
- Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Malta, [Russian Ambassador's speech on the occasion of the National Day of Russia](#), 12 June 2013.
- Malta Today, [Minister Stresses the Importance of Malta-Russia Relations](#), 20 December 2013.

3. Power relations in the EU

Criticism towards austerity measures

In the absence of public opinion surveys it is difficult to nail down what the prevalent view is on the growth vs. austerity debate and Germany's role in the EU.

Malta has not had the need to impose austerity measures and hence public and official views are swayed by this fact. The dominant perspective is certainly against austerity. Malta's economic performance has not so far warranted any cutbacks. Preferred reform options are not clear and there have been few public statements on this topic by the main decision-makers. Before taking up ministerial responsibilities and during his time as an MEP, the Finance Minister Edward Scicluna spoke out against austerity measures and "blanket austerity" measures.

Historic ties with the UK, but no strong views on 'Brexit'

In the press there have been precious few assessments of the effects of an EU exit by the United Kingdom on Malta. Malta enjoys close relations with the UK for historical reasons. Malta is also a member of the Commonwealth. But Malta does not toe a UK line in the EU and it has often differed with it, the latest example was on support for Jean-Claude Juncker as Commission President.

Links:

- Miriam Dalli, [Cameron's EU referendum may leave Malta orphaned of important political ally](#), 29 January 2013.
- Malta Independent, [Scicluna speaks out against blank austerity measures](#), 23 May 2010.
- The Report, [Q&A with Edward Scicluna](#), September 2011.
- Trans European Policy Studies Association, [Britain and the EU: views of members of the TEPSA network](#).