

The multi-level electoral system of the EU: Striking a balance of previous research and defining the research agenda for the future

CONNEX sponsored conference on multi-level electoral systems

Paper abstract:

**Public Discourse on EU membership and EU policies as factor in political competition**

(EU “new comers” after the accession)

Dr. Oľga Gyárfášová

Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava

In the first EP election the voting pattern of the “new-comers” countries did not follow the model of the “old” EU members – strengthening the opposition and voting for eu-sceptical or anti-EU parties. For example in Slovakia extreme parties eu-skeptical and eu-phobes parties (communists or nationalists) mobilizing the anti-EU sentiments was not successful. The mobilization was above all party identification driven, not driven by party competition on policies (neither national nor EU). The results were to great extent determined by very different level of mobilization. The overall phenomenon was turnout even lower than in EU15. All in all the second order election thesis was applicable only partially.

In some new countries the first after-accession national election brought populist and “strange” political parties into the power (above all in Slovakia and Poland). Some of these parties are (or were) europhobe (Slovak nationalists, Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, League of Polish Families, Self-Defence); eu- incompatible – are not members of EU party families, or due to certain steps they are not accepted and “punished” recently (suspension of membership for Smer party). The post-entry national election results are often interpreted as “reform and transformation fatigue” but also as a reaction of the voters to the EU accession process which was demanding and tough. As a consequence - the populism is on rise, moreover, is entering the foreign policy areas more than ever before.

Effects of these changes in domestic politics on

1. perception of the EU and the role of EU and EU policies in the public discourse
2. pattern of the main axis of party competition
3. electoral dynamics and interdependency national vs. EU election few years after the accession and approaching second EP election.