

Electoral Behaviour of Students – First-Time Voters in the European Parliament Election (2009)

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Electoral Behaviour of Students – First-Time Voters in the European Parliament Election (2009). Slovak Republic achieved the lowest voters turnout in the European Parliament elections both in 2004 (16.9 %) and in 2009 (19.6 %). Slight increase in the turnout that was recorded in 2009 by 2.7 % to 19.6 % was with the first-time voters aged 20-23. The evaluation of the voters mobilization has been done by experts who claimed that the only difference between the pre-election campaigns in 2004 and 2009 were mobilization projects focused on students. These projects were financially supported by the European Parliament and the European Commission. One of them was the project SEP of the Department of Political Science, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. During 6 months this project developed activities focused on broadening the students knowledge about the European Union and the European Parliament. The results of the sociological analysis of turnout in the European Parliament elections cast doubt on the statement that the turnout of older citizens was higher than that of young people. Individual segments of young people in Slovakia had completely different voting behaviour. Especially university students identify their future with work in the EU. Therefore the university students turnout was very high (52 %), in fact it was the highest in EU in all structured groups in the 2009 European Parliament.

Key words: European Parliament, Slovak turnout, voters mobilization

Volebné správanie študentov – prvovoličov vo voľbách do Európskeho parlamentu (2009). Slovenská republika dosiahla vo voľbách do Európskeho parlamentu v roku 2004 (16,9 %), ale aj v roku 2009 (19,6 %) najnižšiu účasť voličov spomedzi členských krajín EÚ. Experti pri celkovom hodnotení mobilizácie voličov konštatovali, že relevantným prvkom dlhšou predvolebnú kampaň na Slovensku v roku 2009 od roku 2004 boli v podstate iba mobilizačné projekty finančne podporované samotným Európskym parlamentom a Európskou komisiou zamerané na študujúcu mládež. Jedným z týchto projektov bol projekt KP FF UCM v Trnave SEP, ktorý v priebehu 6 mesiacov intenzívne rozvíjal aktivity zamerané na rast vedomostí študentov o EÚ a EP. Mierny rast volebnej účasti občanov Slovenska v roku 2009 o 2,7 % na 19,6 % sa pripisuje prvovoličom-študentom vo veku od 20-23 rokov. Výsledky sociologických analýz participácie voličov vo voľbách do Európskeho parlamentu v roku 2009 v Európskej únii spochybňujú zjednodušujúce tvrdenie, že účasť starších občanov na voľbách v porovnaní s mladšími bola vyššia. Špecifické segmenty mladej generácie na Slovensku majú odlišné volebné správanie. Predovšetkým vysokoškolská študujúca mládež spája svoju budúcnosť s možnosťami uplatnenia v Európskej únii. Preto aj volebná účasť študentov vysokých škôl bola v Európskej únii (52 %) najvyššia zo všetkých štruktúrnych skupín voličov vo voľbách do Európskeho parlamentu v roku 2009.

Kľúčové slová: Európsky parlament, volebná účasť, mobilizácia voličov

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Introduction

The decrease in the turnout of European Union citizens in EP elections since 1979 (61.9 %) until 2009 (43 %) has been a concern of politicians and political science experts as a problem of European institutions legitimacy.² There are exceptions such as Belgium or Luxembourg, where high turnout (90 %) is still present thanks to the law about compulsory participation in the election. The turnout decrease in EP election is also present in other countries of so-called 15 (from 60 % to 40 %). Really threatening were the elections in 2004 when turnout got lower than 50 %. Surely, it can be assigned to EU enlargement, when especially post-socialist countries brought unusual phenomenon of low turnout in the elections on the level of 15-35 %. United Kingdom had low turnout (around 35 %) before. The country held the last place for the whole period 1979 – 1999.

This position of „strange citizens of the EU“ was taken by Slovak republic in 2004 (See Table 1)

There are some specialties in this case:

- The highest election absence was recorded not only in case of Slovakia (80.4 %), but in Lithuania as well (79 %), Political analyst did not recognize the fact, that the difference between Slovakia and Lithuania is marginal. First place of Slovakia as an EU member state with lowest election turnout results from the stability of the turnout level. Lithuania had 43 % turnout in 2004, therefore the first place for Slovakia is „well-earned“.
- Slovakia was in 2009 included into small group of countries (BG, PL, LV, and EE) that have overcome lowering trend in EP election turnout and have seen increase in the turnout in comparison with 2004. It is important to say, that it is the lowest increase of votes number among given countries, only 2.7 % (16.9 % to 19.6 %)

² Prof. M. Haller and prof. H. Strasser in a study about EP elections 2009 claim that European integration is more suitable for elites than for citizens.

Table 1 – EP election turnout of EU member states citizens since 1979 to 2009

1979	1981	1984	1987	1989	1994	1995	1996	1999	2004	2007	2009
BE	91.36		92.09		90.73	90.66		91.05	90.81		90.39
DK	47.82		52.38		46.17	52.92		50.46	47.89		59.54
DE	65.73		56.76		62.28	60.02		45.19	43		43.3
IE	63.61		47.56		68.28	43.98		50.21	58.58		58.64
FR	60.71		56.72		48.8	52.71		46.76	42.76		40.63
IT	85.65		82.47		81.07	73.6		69.76	71.72		65.05
LU	88.91		88.79		87.39	88.55		87.27	91.35		90.75
NL	58.12		50.88		47.48	35.69		30.02	39.26		36.75
UK	32.35		32.57		36.37	36.43		24	38.52		34.7
EL		81.48	80.59		80.03	73.18		70.25	63.22		52.61
ES				68.52	54.71	59.14		63.05	45.14		44.9
PT				72.42	51.1	35.54		39.93	38.6		36.78
SE						41.63		38.84	37.85		45.53
AT							67.73	49.4	42.43		45.97
FI							57.6	30.14	39.43		40.3
CZ									28.3		28.2
EE									26.83		43.9
CY									72.5		59.4
LT									48.38		20.98
LV									41.34		53.7
HU									38.5		36.31
MT									82.39		78.79
PL									20.87		24.53
SI									28.35		28.33
SK									16.97		19.64
BG										29.22	38.99
RO										29.47	27.67
EÚ total	61.9		58.98		58.41	56.67		49.51	45.47		43

Source: TNS opinion with EP 2009 – 25 member states + Bulgaria and Romania in 2007

Official results of statistics office (Results 2009 www.statistics.sk) state, that from total number 4.345.773 qualified voters 826.782 valid votes were approved, which is 19,6 %. Slovak republic is therefore again on the last place among 27 EU member countries regarding the election turnout.

The topic of electoral behaviour of Slovak citizens in case of the EP election was elaborated as well in 2004 when we prepared individual research reflection that was presented as a part of analysis of Slovak integration into European Union. Results of sociological survey „Youth and European identity“ in 2002 showed³, that as well electoral behaviour of young people can possess some individualities. Low turnout of Slovak citizens in 2004 EP elections (16.9 %)

³ European Commission supported survey „The Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity“. Quantitative research was realized in 2002 and qualitative in 2003. Details can be found at www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/youth and www.vyskumladeze.sk

put the political scene of Slovakia to shame in Europe. Experts were interpreting this fact as a public protest against low political culture, against spats between leaders of governmental political parties, against political instability in the country. Low turnout that was not overseen by Europe must be interpreted as a loud slap of Slovak citizens to then government and party politics as such. Low turnout in EP elections is often legitimate way of „punishing“ national governments for their politics. It does not express relationship with European institutions and European governance.

Classical paradox, i.e. *high credibility of European Parliament and European Commission among citizens on the one hand and low turnout in EP elections on the other* which marked Slovak entering into European history not only in 2004 but as well in 2009, inspired experts to re-evaluation of this phenomenon interpretation. EUROACTIV remark says literally “Low turnout does not mean less legitimacy”.⁴ Problem of EU institutions “legitimacy” that would rise from low election turnout is key factor for European political parties. Result from 2009 (43 %) in comparison with the one from 2004 (45 %) is being interpreted as a signal of certain stabilization in election participation of EU citizens. Next election in 2014 will presumably confirm this trend.

1. Electoral behaviour of young people and first-time voters

The issue of first-time voters' electoral behaviour is in the contemporary discourse especially linked to the election year 1998 (Macháček 2002). In 1998 because of intensive pre-election campaign among students organized by civil society organizations and third sector as a whole marked extraordinary high election turnout of young people. Experts agreed that election turnout of young people was close to the turnout of older age groups.

However, generally the young people's turnout, especially first-time voters is lower than it is in case of older age groups. Researches of specialized agencies confirmed this individual feature of young people's electoral behaviour. It can be seen in the unwillingness to participate in the elections from various reasons (because it rains or it is too hot). Reasons that are more acceptable could be the fact that young people are not able to decide to whom they give their vote and which political party they prefer. In some periods, a choice of some political party can be a real problem not only for young first-time voters. According to O. Gyarfášová (Gyarfášová 2001) in 2000 – 2001 65-70 % of total potential voters were decided who to vote for, whereas in the group of young voters there were only 50 % that were decide.

⁴ © EUROACTIV European elections 2009. Commentary 2003 – 2009 I-Europa, ltd.

After 1990, there is an obvious trend of lowering turnout of citizens not only in European but as well in parliamentary and presidential elections that are perceived as important by citizens. First-time voters usually have lower turnout and higher absence, the attention is concentrated on the *motivation for absence* in the elections. We ask the question why citizen will not vote. Z. Bútorová and O. Gyarfášová created *structural typology* based on analysis of election preferences in 2006 that enables us to differentiate comprehensible interpretative lines of absence. The respondents'⁵ answers explaining various reasons of election absence were divided into three groups:

1. *the loss of trust into political parties and politicians that only see their own profit*
2. *the feeling of helplessness, uselessness and vanity*
3. *the feeling of disorientation and cognitive helplessness, absence of convincing alternative*

The reasons of potential non-voters are according to the authors then a mixture of *frustration and resignation stemming from cognitive disorientation and drifting apart from politic*. We can assume that this mixture of reasons for absence is present in all kinds of present election, EP elections as well. The same can be said in case of 2009 EP elections. Based on our sociological survey of studying young people we have two kinds of information about reasons for absence in the elections: the first one informs about situation before the elections (Table 2) and the second informs about the situation of respondent (Table 3) after the 2009 EP elections.

Disgust from political evolution (57 %) and distrust in political parties (27 %) in Slovakia are the most significant set of reasons of first – time voters - students absence in 2009 EP elections in both time moments of their decision process. Equally important reasons for absence are vagueness and poor presentation of program aims of political parties in the area of European politics.

Moreover, there is a fact, that first-time voters do not know particular results of European parliament's legislative activity and the impact of this activity on the everyday life of Slovak citizens.

However, the most important fact is that moral judgment of the candidates for MPs, because in the opinion of our respondents they care only for their own profit and high remuneration.

⁵ Slovakia and voters before the elections: the look behind the curtain of voters' preferences. (Bútorová, Gyarfášová 2006).

Table 2 – Why would you not participate in the elections to the EP?

	%
My vote does not matter	10.8
No trust to any political party or movement	27.7
The elections does not change anything	11.4
Dissatisfied with the political development	7.2
Poor concern about ordinary people	3.6
No political program for me	3.6
Not acknowledge with party program	15.1
Dissapointed with all political parties	1.2
No concern in politics	10.8
Other	1.8
Do not know	6.6

Sample: 166 students in the age 18-23

Table 3 – Why have you not participated in the EP elections?

	%
My vote does not count	36.9
In offence with EU, against unification and integration	12.4
Elections to the EP do not change anything in the EU	38.7
The elections do no change anything in the EU governance	41.4
Dissapointed with the political development in Slovakia	57.7
EP does not deal with issues that concern us	53.0
Slovak political parties does not reflect the EU politics	42.6
MEP's care only about themselves	58.4
Lack of information about MEP's work	54.7

Sample: 477 students in the age 18-23

Table 4 – What should have change to alter your will in electoral participation?

	If I could vote even on Friday afternoon (Czech Republic)	If I could vote by the mean of cell phone or internet	In case of different weather conditions
Yes	17	43	10
No	83	57	90

Lastly there is need to react on the new technological possibilities of communication, being used by the youngest generation. Results of sociological survey shown above (Table 4) which was taken after the EP elections in Slovakia imply that such outer factors such as weather or election duration for

2 days would not change the attitude of the first-time voters towards election turnout. On the contrary, using internet or mobile phone could mean significant breakthrough in young people's EP election turnout in Slovakia. In Estonia, where people could vote for the first time via internet in EP election in 2009, turnout increased from 26.8 % in 2004 to 43.9 % in 2009.

2. Mobilization of the first-time voters in EP elections

The EP elections in 2009 were very similar to the election in 2004 – none of them was interesting for the public. Experts' evaluation of the voters' mobilization towards election turnout stated that significant factors differentiating pre-election campaign in Slovakia in 2009 from the campaign in 2004 were only the projects targeting young students funded by European parliament and European Commission⁶.

One of these projects was the one conducted by the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, SEP (Student European Parliament) which during 6 months developed activities aimed at increasing of the students' knowledge about the EU and EP and mobilized them and their parents as well to participate in the election. The increase in the result of 2.7 % could be assigned mostly to the turnout of young students – first – time voters. According to the survey conducted during 10 days after the election (8 June 2009) shown that the turnout in the EP election in the parent population of 170 000 students – qualified voters was 33 %. They cast about 54 740 valid votes. We can say that the turnout was 1,6 times bigger in comparison with total population registered in the electoral list. First-time voters – students, aged 18-23 form 3.91 % from the total number of qualified voters. They represent 6.41 % of cast votes.

As Eurobarometer surveys conducted, few days after the election day proved that the highest election turnout was in the specific group of citizens: university students aged 20-24. Intensive information campaign brought its results in the election behaviour of the target group. As we can see from the Eurobarometer results Slovak public as a whole also perceived the information campaign: the most people that remember the EP pre-election campaign are in Malta (89 %), in Sweden (86 %), but in Slovakia as well (82 %).

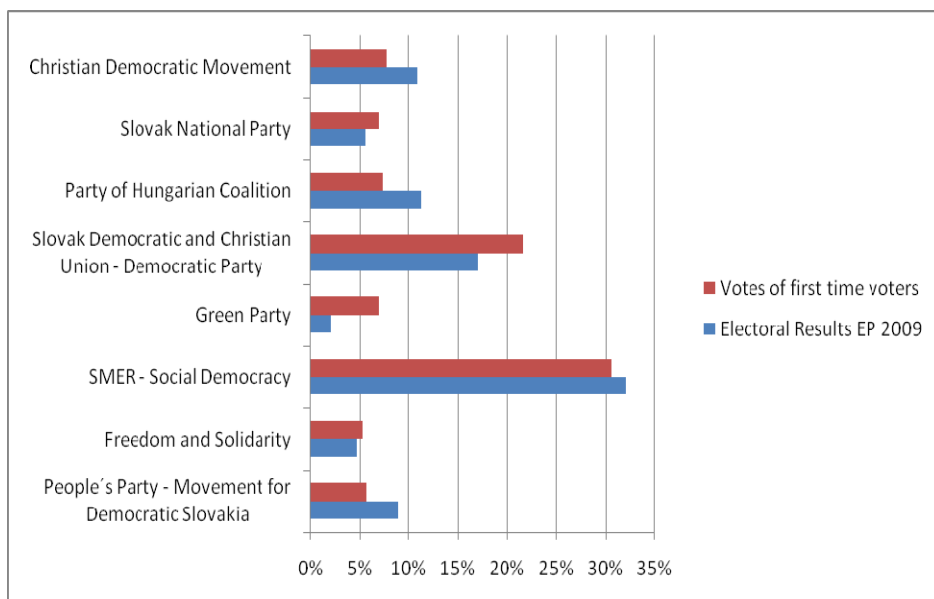
⁶ E.g. Eurotrain (IUVENTA) „You are European parliament as well“ (IO EP Bratislava), „Young European“ (EC representation in Bratislava)

3. Preferences and identification with political parties

2009 EP election results (Chart 1) confirmed long-term preferences of political parties among citizens of Slovakia.

Comparison of official election results and political parties preferences done by students in 2009 shows that young people aged 18-23 preferred Green Party and party Freedom and Solidarity (SAS). Their votes would mean more than 5 % of total number of votes for their parties, which would help them to get at least one mandate of a European MP.

Chart 1 Number of valid votes for individual political parties in the EP election in 2009 and votes of students – first-time voters



Popular for young people among parliamentary political parties is right-wing party SDKÚ-DS (Slovak Christian and Democratic Union – Democratic Party) and partly nation-oriented party SNS (Slovak National Party). Classical centre-right (HZDS-ĽS – Movement for democratic Slovakia – Peoples party) and conservative-Christian (KDH – Christian – democratic movement) parties did not gather such significant attention between students – first – time voters as in the EP election in 2009. The position of the decisive governing party SMER – Social democracy is in both cases in harmony – 30 %.

Each political party that acquired votes of the students – first-time voters is specifically differentiating itself from the other political parties by the level of

their identification with the party program and politics (Table 5). Especially new party Freedom and solidarity (SAS) is attracting our interest, because it features the highest level of first-time voters' identification. (30.8 % of supporters and 53.8 % of strongly identified). As a new party not being compromised by real politics, the party is attractive for young people with high ideals and requests for principality in compliance with program aims and moral values in politics.

Table 5 Attitude towards elected political party in EP election - first-time voters (6 June 2009)

	Absolute identification, supporter	Mostly identified, sometimes different attitude	The politics of the party is close to my attitude, but often I do not claim the same	I do not identify with the party politics but I do not mind the party	Do not know
SMER – Social Democracy	9.3	53.3	24.0	8.0	5.3
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic...	7.5	49.1	22.6	17.0	3.8
Christian Democratic Movement	26.3	15.8	31.6	21.1	5.3
Party of Hungarian Coalition	5.6	27.8	38.9	16.7	11.1
Green Party	17.6	41.2	23.5	17.6	0.0
Slovak National Party	11.8	29.4	47.1	5.9	5.9
People's Party – Movement for Democratic Slovakia	21.4	42.9	14.3	14.3	7.1
Freedom and Solidarity	30.8	53.8	7.7	0.0	7.7

Second group is represented by two parliamentary political parties KDH (Christian – Democratic Movement – 21.4 %) and HZDS – ĽS (Movement for democratic Slovakia – Peoples Party 21.4 %), that have relatively big groups of definite supporters. HZDS-ĽS moreover gains numerous numbers of identified supporters with occasional reservations. KDH has among all parties the biggest number of supporters that are not identifying themselves with the party politics, but they mind the politics the party does the least. It is good to say, that these two parties have less supporters among young students than in total population.

Particular attention is given to similar distribution of SMER and SDKÚ – DS voters on the scale of identification with elected party. It is clear here, that both parties have only few supporters without reservations among students. The representation of supporters with critical distance and constructive potential is very strong in this group, notwithstanding if it is occasional or frequent disapproving attitude towards the particular politics of these parties.

4. First-time voters playing the game of self-assured citizen – preferential votes⁷

In the research we devoted our attention to the specialty of these elections, that gave possibility to first-time voters to play „citizen“ and to express their disagreement with leadership or „bosses“ of political parties, that defined the order of candidates on the election lists. Regarding the total number of places for Slovakia in European parliament, the placement of the candidate on the first and second place of the list was a guarantee of electability. So called „circling“ or preferential votes⁸ enabled those candidates for European MPs placed lower on the list of candidates to give their individual pre-election campaign a meaning.

The mobilization of some thousand of voters had its impact on the final order of elected candidates already in 2004 regarding relatively low election turnout. E.g., A. Duka-Zolyomi (SMK – Party of Hungarian Coalition) was with 6 thousand preferential votes moved from third to second place and became MP instead of J. Berényi. Acquirement of high number of preferential votes moves elected MP as well in some kind of imaginary scale of citizen legitimacy and credibility in comparison with other European MPs. In the SDKÚ-DS party candidate for MP Peter Šťastný got unbelievable number of preferential votes (74 000), which represented 62 % of total votes for this party. Second and third candidate got only few thousand votes.

In the EP election in 2009 citizens managed to reorder the candidates list created by leaderships of the political parties even more. In case of SDKÚ –

⁷ This term is being used in processing the EP election results in years 2004 and 2009. (Results ...2009).

⁸ Act FZ NO.47/1990 Zb. (February 1990) says about the possibility of so-called preferential voting. “On the chosen candidates list it was possible to circle name of maximum 4 candidates. If at least one tenth of total number of voters, who in the given electoral ward gave their valid votes for particular political party, used their right to preferential vote, mandate was firstly given to such candidate that got qualified majority of votes from voters of the political party that used their right to preferential vote. Later it showed up that preferential voting was applied quite often, but too high quorum for preferential voting led to the fact, that its influence on the composition of elected MPs was trivial. (Elections....2008, s. 115)

DS it was confirmed that competency of the first candidate Eduard Kukan was rewarded by 80 244 voters and he got 57.14 % of votes in favor of the party. SMK has doubtless the best accord between nominations and results of the election. First candidate Edit Bauer got 39 721 votes (42.36 %) and second candidate Alajos Mészáros got 20 652 votes (22.02 %), therefore they sustained their positions with reasonable distance.

Research of students – first-time voters showed special popularity of Monika Flašíková-Beňová, who got 107 097 votes (40.45 %) and therefore moved from third place to the leading position of numerous group of MPs elected for the party SMER – Social Democracy. Second place was taken by candidate no.1 Boris Zala with 102 940 votes (38.88 %). The rest of candidates such as Vladimír Maňka (42 885 votes – 16.20%), and mainly Monika Smolková (15 830 votes – 5.97 %) and Katarína Neveďalová (4378 votes – 1.65 %) got their mandates thanks to position on the list of candidates of their political party.

The least accurate estimate of popularity of their candidates among party supporters had leaders of SNS and KDH. MP of EP for SNS has become Jaroslav Paška with total number of votes 12 981 (28.24 %) and the leader of the list was moved to third place. Dušan Švantner as a leader of the candidates list got only 9,292 votes (20.21 %) and was outvoted.

The biggest surprise in KDH management was caused by voters by declassing No. 1 nominee Martin Fronc who fell down to the fourth position with 15,861 votes (17.64 %), and left the first position for Anna Záborská, candidate with the third position at the electoral ticket with 43,356 votes (48.22 %). That confirmed that the party panel's effort to move its significant member "higher" or "to the side", i.e. out of interpolitical activities was overlooked by voters, and they "punished" it by low number of preferential votes. Miroslav Mikolášik, successful MEP, moved from the fourth to the second position with 29,764 preferential votes (33.10 %).

These results correspond to the results of students – first time voters research on whether they used the possibility of preferential voting (Table 6). Negative answer prevails in case of two parties: HZDS-LS (64 %) and SMK (61 %). That corresponds to the fact that the first nominees of these political parties gained their MEP position. On the other hand, there are parties whose supporters among first time voters preferred their candidate by "circling". Circling is the most typical for two parliamentary parties: KDH (36.8 %) and SNS (29.4 %). Nominees at the first places did not gain the MEP position in neither party.

1. What did students – first time voters know about the EP election?

Objective of the first research of KP FF UCM in Trnava was to find out⁹, how young people – first time voters orientate in electoral terms planned for 2009 and 2010 in Slovakia, and what their intentions are regarding participation (Table 6) in presidential election, EP election, regional election (2009) and SR National Council and municipal elections (2010).

Table 6 – Predicted electoral turnout

	Presidential elections	Parliamentary elections	European parliament elections	Regional elections
certainly participate	37.8	25.7	21.3	10.8
almost certainly participate	14.4	15.1	13.0	12.3
maybe participate	19.2	20.4	22.1	21.2
maybe participate, maybe not	15.6	21.3	21.4	19.8
probably not participate	5.1	6.7	9.3	9.4
almost certainly not participate	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
certainly not participate	3.	4.3	5.2	6.5
do not know	3.6	4.9	5.9	8.5

Sample: 965 students in the age 18-23

In case of the EP election we can say that it belonged to less important ones in 2009, mainly in comparison with the presidential election. Also presupposed participation of students – first time voters in presidential (37.8 %) and in European (21.3 %) elections confirms that. Also Eurobarometer results concerning the EP election¹⁰ enabled us to state that pre-election situation can be characterised by information deficiency about the EP, its competences as well overall activity of Slovak MEPs after 2004.¹¹ In our case, we found out that 50 % of students assume that the salary of MEPs is substantially higher than the salary of SR National Council members, but only 32.6 % of students

⁹ The first sociological research (966 students between 18 and 23) executed by the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Arts at UCM in Trnava at the end of January 2009.

¹⁰ In Eurobarometer (EB Standard 71) – spring 2009 • Population: EU 15 + Scope: EU 27 • 27,218 of European citizens. Time of field-work: • half of January – half of February 2000. This research was executed also in Slovakia simultaneously with our research of students – first time voters, and enabled us to compare both researches' results.

¹¹ Within the pre-election campaign, we prepared „mobilisation“ inquiry of MEPs, and we published it at www.sepeu.sk. These MEPs contributed to the inquiry: I. Belohorská, Z. Pleštínska, V. Maňka, E. Bauer, J. Hudacký, M. Mikolášik, P. Štastný, M. Gaľa, and B. Zala). Project plenary events in Trnava and Bratislava were attended by E. Bauer, M. Mikolášik and P. Baco.

knew J. Figel, the EC commissioner for education, culture, youth and sport, representing Slovakia in the EU, and 24.6 % of students knew that we would vote only 13 MEPs in the EP election.

Students are predominantly interested in education quality and job opportunities (Table 7) but they realize that all relevant fields under the motion European policy are important. European topics concerning the EU unification itself, i.e. processes of the EU governance changes, do not belong among the priority ones. We can more precisely state that students – first time voters were not attracted by pre-election agenda focused on the European governance issues. They assume that consumer protection, struggle against terrorism or security policy deserve bigger attention.

Table 7 – What students concern?

	Absolutely no intention	Rare intention	Regular intention	Maximum intention	Do not know
Environmental issues	10.1	48.2	26.7	13.7	1.3
Work and education activities	4.4	29.3	4.1	25.2	1.0
Public service or facilities (transport, leisure activities)	12.3	38.1	34.6	13.0	2.1
Poverty	11.7	46.0	26.3	13.2	2.8
Gender equality	18.1	41.1	24.9	12.2	3.7
Terrorism	17.0	43.6	23.8	12.0	3.6
Discrimination of ethnic minorities	20.2	45.2	21.0	9.7	4.0
Animal rights	25	36.6	21.7	12.7	4.1
Unification of Europe	18.4	40.9	24.4	10.7	5.5
Quality and scope education	7.2	29.4	33.4	27.1	2.9

Sample: 963 students in the age 18-23

Table 8 – Students trust...

	Absolutely no trust	No trust	Nor, neither.	Trust	Absolute trust	Do not know
Government of Slovakia	8.7	18.2	37.9	29.8	2.4	3.6
Political parties	10.1	28.6	43.6	13.7	0.7	3.0
Parliament of Slovakia	10.1	28.6	43.6	13.7	1.2	3.0
Politicians of Slovakia	17.5	29.0	39.9	10.2	0.7	3.0
European Commission	5.2	9.7	37.0	39.3	4.6	4.0
European Parliament	5.2	9.7	36.7	39.6	5.7	4.0
Greenpeace	10.8	13.6	35.5	26.3	7.7	6.0
Courts of Slovakia	14.7	20.1	36.8	22.2	2.2	4.0
Amnesty international	6.4	9.8	37.1	24.7	5.2	17.0

Sample: 963 students in the age 18-23

Table 9 – In the last decade the role of the European Parliament has...?

	%
Strengthen	34
Been the same	24
Weaken	8
Do not know	34

Sample: 757 students in the age 18-23

Students state that the EP position has rather been strengthening over last 10 years (Table 8) and credibility of the EP and EU as a whole was traditionally at a high level, compared to other, predominantly national, institutions (Table 9).

Conclusions

During pre-election preparation for 2009 EP election, we recorded several extensive information and mobilization projects financed from the EC and EP means. Information campaign focused on participation of young people in the EP election suggested that students could motivate themselves to the participation in similar participation projects. In Eastern Slovakia in

particular.¹² Students enjoy competing for meaningful prizes, and with their teachers' support, they literally "fight" for the good name of their school. They are able to learn necessary facts about the EU, however they not always understand connections within the European integration and EU governance changes.

Like Eurobarometer results confirmed¹³, more citizens older than 55 (50 %) than between 18 and 29 (29 %) participated in 2009 EP election in the European average. This is valid even for students between 18 and 24 as a whole (34 %), whose electoral participation was at the level of participation of the unemployed and manual workers. It is not surprising that the higher educational level, the higher participation in the election. We confirmed the hypothesis that the more optimistic views of a student – first time voter about his/her personal future, the higher participation in 2009 EP election.

Eurobarometer's finding that the highest (52 %) voters share, in the European average, was in a specific group of studying youth who were studying at universities also after 20 verifies the analysis of clarification of 2009 EP election results in Slovakia. We thus cannot remain within simplified interpretations of citizens' voting behaviour. Journalistic interpretation scheme (cliché), e.g. that *older voters use to participate in elections more often than younger ones* has traditionally been applied upon interpretations of the National Council election results, in presidential elections or elections to self-governing regions.

In case of 2009 EP election, we verified the hypothesis that electoral participation may differ in different social segments of "old" or "young" generation age categories. Studying youth, predominantly university students as the future social elite, connect their future with possibilities to apply in the EU. Therefore, also electoral participation of university students – first time voters was the highest among all structural groups of voters in 2009 EP election not only in Slovakia.

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¹² Detailed analysis of participation of secondary grammar school students in knowledge test at www.sepeu.sk showed that more than 60 % were from two regions in Eastern Slovakia.

¹³ EB71.3 – EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009. Post-electoral survey, First-results: European average and major national trends. Directorate General for Communication Direction C – Relations with citizens, PUBLIC OPINION MONITORING UNIT, 24/07/2009 *Unité de suivi de l'opinion publique*: Jacques Nancy, Nives Žun, Elise Defourny, Jonas Trifot

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