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Voter profiler: antidote to Euro-apathy?

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 Start the EU Profiler

When are the European elections? And who will you be voting for? Most of the 300 million European voters have no answer to these questions. But an antidote is being developed for this apathy: a voting profiler to guide the voter through the maze of European ideas and preferences.

Is Europe too remote from the voters? During the US presidential elections last year, Europeans proved quite willing to take a position about issues which were not exactly relevant to them, such as the pros and cons of electing a black president.



A record number of curious Europeans also consulted one of the many voter profilers. And why not? The United States is not right next door and this gave them an overview of the important policy positions at a glance.

Tourist in Europe

Voter profilers are popular during national elections, but only as a fun extra. In national elections people are dealing with issues which affect them directly such as the economic crisis, and voters are accustomed to see the candidates appearing regularly - ad nauseam - in the media.

Seen in this light, the elections for the European Parliament - on 4 June - more closely resemble the elections in the United States. However, it may not always seem that way given the involvement of parties and faces which are familiar from domestic politics.

Filling in a profiler enables European voters to penetrate this smokescreen. For a while you can feel like a tourist on your own continent and that can be as revealing - and addictive - as it was for Europeans paying a visit to US election websites last year.

Holy Grail

It was as a result of considerations of this kind that the EU Profiler was launched in Brussels. The creators regard it as the Holy Grail of profilers since it enables you to line up the views of all the European parties alongside each other, without any need for background knowledge. Amsterdam political scientist André Krouwel, one of the people behind the EU Profiler.

"We spent a year and a half working to give all the European parties a nice profile and see where they stand. We look as far as possible at issues which concern Europe, and those which play a role in as many countries as possible. Because then you can make comparisons for yourself. Not only in the Netherlands, but with all the other parties in Europe."

Pointing at the neighbours

This introduction to the views of foreign parties could just act as an antidote to the apathy prevalent in countries like the Netherlands, according to another project member, Peter Mair of the European University in Bologna, Italy.

"Dutch people increasingly, and probably more than anyone else in Europe at the moment, are discontented - or seem to be discontented - with how they stand in the landscape of their own country. They're seeing parties which appear not to represent them and a political class which apparently has moved away from listening to voters. So they can see if this is true in other countries. Maybe if their positions are better reflected in other countries, they can take that and go back to their own parties and their own representatives and say: listen, this party here offers me a better representation than you do, why is that?"

Too many choices

Whether a better-founded choice makes it easier for all the floating or stay-at-home European voters is of course a different question. Slovenian journalist Michael Manske says:

"The EU Profiler site seems like a perfect match for me, in that I'm still unsure about who to vote for in the upcoming elections. However, the end results don't really help me so much. I'm equidistant from all the major parties, I'm in a kind of no man's land of sorts. In fact, the actual nearest party is one that I definitely wouldn't vote for."

So you do have to be open-minded and prepared for surprises. But we're talking about more than 700 seats in the European Parliament divided among 27 different countries.

Compared with this, Obama vs McCain was just kid's stuff.

* RNW translation (gsh)

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Reaction

jasmin, 24-04-2009 - India

(s):

Still your politicians are much better than the politicians we have in our country. No candidate is worth voting for. Either the candidate is tainted or the party manifesto is not good. Though the manifestoes hardly matter, the candidates get selctive amnesia and forget what they proposed to do. We are caught between the devil and the sea...and there is turmoil in our neighbouring countries. Compared with this European elections and US elections are just kid stuff !

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