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Innovative 'compass' to boost voters' interest in EU elections

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A team of prominent EU scholars last week unveiled the 'EU Profiler', an innovative 'voting advice' website that allows citizens across Europe to find their political identity ahead of the upcoming European Parliament elections in June.

Background:

The idea of an online tool to gauge political orientation is not a new one. The [Electoral Compass](#) has existed in the US for several years. The 'EU Profiler', however, is the first and most comprehensive of its kind to deal exclusively with the EU political landscape.

EU Profiler was designed and set up by a consortium consisting of the [European University Institute](#) (Florence), [Kieskompas](#), a Dutch company that has made similar tools in the past, and the Zurich-based [NCCR Democracy/Politools](#) network.

The premise is simple: you go to [www.euprofiler.eu](#), choose your country and language (from a choice of English or your national language), and then answer a set of 30 questions. Twenty-eight of these are standardised questions to assess your broad European political identity, and two are country-specific, allowing for greater national accuracy.

The same 30 questions have been applied to 300 national parties across Europe, to build a truly European spectrum of party orientation.

In theory, therefore, the profiler will show not only which party in the home country of those surveyed is best matched to their political identity, but which party in any of those 30 countries best corresponds to their choice.

According to its initiators, EU Profiler is the first tool of its kind to appear in the EU political landscape, and should give voters some interesting food for thought as they go to the ballot boxes.

Billing itself as a means for voters to gain "an unobstructed view of the European political landscape, and their place within it," the elaborate online tool has analysed some 300 European parties in 30 European countries.

Logistically, the task was unique, with more than 120 academic collaborators from across Europe – four assigned to each of the 30 countries – participating. The fathers of the EU Profiler were also quick to point out that the tool was built without any EU funding, guaranteeing their independence and credibility.

Finding your political homeland

The true innovation of the profiler is to show electors, once they have answered a 30-question poll, not only the party that is closest to their beliefs in their home country, but also their ideological 'home party', wherever that may be in Europe. Finding a "political homeland" might "decrease the electoral insecurity of voters," say the EU Profiler experts.

"It forces both voters and parties to analyse their own standing," they told EurActiv. By extension, it also analyses the cohesiveness of European sister parties, demonstrating for example that "Social Democrats are quite cohesive, but Liberals are all over the place," according to one of the experts in the managing team.

In the long run, this may have a number of interesting consequences. If a voter who normally votes for a liberal candidate in his home European ballot finds that his political beliefs are better represented by, say, a centre-left party in another country, this could stir voter interest for a future pan-European election.

The Profiler will therefore show precisely how big the transnational vote "could and should be" in a single EU

constituency.

The team of social scientists conceded that for a voter, discovering that their ideal party is in another country "could put some people off voting, as it shows you're not adequately represented at national level," but they added that "we think the opposite will happen".

Test-driving the profiler

A small test panel at EurActiv's offices tested the tool, and feedback was generally positive. In the main, people found the questions to be reasonable and the results – particularly the pan-European dimension – to be fascinating.

However, one Swedish user who tested the profiler and answered the 30 questions found the results perplexing. The profiler found that while this voter's nearest party in Sweden was the governing centre-right party Moderaterna (with a 76.5% match), the opposition centre-left Social Democratic party was almost identical, with a 75% match.

Furthermore, the profiler found that this voter was equally compatible with not only the Social Democrats, but the growing Pirate Party ([EurActiv 22/02/09](#)), as well as the Center Party and Folkpartiet, both of which are in the governing coalition. There was a 75% match for all these parties, a bizarre fact given that they differ on so many key policy issues.

The website's disclaimer says that "a guarantee cannot be given regarding completeness, accuracy as regards content, actuality or reliability of the information".


The EU Profiler's initiators hope that millions of people will use the tool in the coming months, providing a wealth of statistics for future analysis.

Next steps:

- **4-7 June 2009:** European Parliament elections.

Links

Surveys and data

- EU Profiler: [homepage](#) 

Blogs

- The European Citizen: [My EU Profiler profile](#) 