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[Sometimes it's almost as if Europe really exists.](#)

Posted by [Mats SIFFELS](#) Apr 24th, 2009 | [6 responses](#)

I was going to start this post by saying what a good day today had been for Europe. I was going to say how today it seemed as if Europe was everywhere; your average voter that had no idea about it whatsoever would finally encounter his or her own 'Aha-erlebnis'. My EUphoria all started yesterday-evening, [Pauw&Witteman](#), our own Larry King Live (except for the fact that they need double the people to have half the fun), announced that today they would host a debate between all the Dutch EP-election partyleaders.

The next morning I found out that the newspaper *Trouw* was running a cover-story on the elections. On my way to the city centre I decided to buy one. It was 9.30 and whereas all other newspapers were still abundantly available, I only barely managed to get my hands on the last copy of *Trouw*, bearing the frontpage article: [translation-alert] "[There is no place to go for Eurosceptical voters — If you want less Europe, the populists are the only possibility](#)" – Coincidence?

Before I continue my rant, this article does deserve some special attention: it was dedicated to the result of an analysis of the political position of all the parties in all the EU Member States (+Croatia -soon to be?-, Turkey -most controversial candidate- and Switzerland -allegedly a joke-). The conclusion, as shown in the title, is especially remarkable concerning the situation in the Netherlands. For some reason in the Netherlands only one political party uses this campaign to emphasise its Pro-European ideals, the Social-Liberal [D66](#), running under the slogan "[Europe? Yes!](#)". They are doing so under the conviction that they are actually the only party in the Netherlands that can be considered to be Pro-European. Lately [Groen-Links](#) has joined them, "[Looking forward to the Future](#)". However, although both are established political parties in the Netherlands, they do not belong to the hard-core of Dutch government. For both D66 and Groen Links, in terms of political importance, think a little under 10 out of a 150 seats in our National Parliament on average. [Wim van de Camp](#), the Euro-politician for the Christian [CDA](#), the party of our current prime-minister ([the completely comfortable guy on the right](#)), said today, in [another article](#) in the same newspaper that he would "go to Brussel to represent the Dutch interest", "The European interest is not the Dutch interest"; in the same article the Socialist politician ([SP](#)), Dennis de Jong ([scroll down](#)) states he will use the European Parliament as a "platform" to "explain in the Netherlands what is going on in Brussels and protest against neoliberal policy"; the social-democrat [PvdA](#) has remained very moderate, almost cautious in its approach towards Europe and according to the Liberal [VVD](#) it is about "[European market, Dutch jobs](#)". Finally, the populist [PVV](#) ([Geert "the-first-MP-ever-to-be-denied-access-to-the-UK" Wilders](#)) is running under the header "[Choose for the Netherlands- More Netherlands, less Europe!](#)" (And, completely in the spirit of 'Maggy' Thatcher, fresh EP Partyleader

Barry Madlener shouted out: “We want our money back!”, inspiring VVD’s Hans van Baalen to shout out: “Well, we want our money back too.”)



"There is no place to go for Eurosceptical voters
-- If you want less Europe, the populists are the only possibility"

Getting back to the analysis: it is interesting to find that if one actually looks at the election-programmes only the SP and the PVV can be considered to be “opposed to European integration”; all the others seem to be “in favour of”, regardless of their electoral vocabulary.

A downer for D66’s [Sophie in ‘t Veld](#), since at their congress in March the keynote speaker and former Prime Minister of Belgium, [Guy Verhofstadt](#) stated that it was a very strategically smart choice of them to go for the Pro-European vote: they would be the only one, whereas all the other parties would have to fight for the Eurosceptical vote, D66 was already dreaming of spectacular results. Now, as it turns out, the situation is the other way around.

The reason for this elaborate political analysis is the launch of the website [EUProfiler](#), a website where every European, by giving his opinion on 30 statements can determine his position in the political landscape in his own language in order to answer the question: “Who should I give my vote to?”

Tools like this are always surrounded by a certain amount of scepticism, but I have tried it, and in my case, it worked; furthermore, the project is conducted by a number of experienced academics and supported by expert panels from all participating countries. It is of course still interesting to see to what extent sites like this are reliable. Knowing nothing about politics, would you still be properly represented if you would vote for the party following the advice of the EUProfiler? ([Try](#), and let us know) Another, [similar website](#) has announced it will have the actual politicians test it. Rumour has it that during the same test last year every one of them, from left to right, turned out to be social-democrats. One can learn so much about himself.

So far a pretty European day in Maastricht.

My disappointment outed at the beginning of this article was based on the fact that the debate that was planned to be hosted by P&W did not take place, instead the show dealt with the almost acquisition of the new boy-toy of the Dutch military, the [Joint Strike Fighter](#).



"Where's Wally?"

Despite this damper, I was going to say, it seems as though the national media have finally started to pay the attention to these elections in the way they deserve; the editors-in-chief seem to take on the responsibility of at least trying to inform the citizens. Since, clearly, despite the lack of electoral motivation, these are important and deal with real issues (although I wouldn't have to tell you, since stating an argument like this on this Community-platform is like trying to convert the Pope to Catholicism). When will the party's follow suit? Today I spotted my first party-affiliated campaign-poster, a low profile local politician hoping for some kind of miracle, hidden behind a poster promoting a Free-beer-for-students-party. Tonight those who hope to prolong or earn their seat in Brussels (and sometimes Strasbourg) were offered a stage on national television at the table of P&W, one of the most highly coveted spots on television. The result: a no-show. The excuse: they were debating on national issues. "They hope to reschedule the debate to some other time" announced tonight's host...

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6 Responses to "Sometimes it's almost as if Europe really exists."



Josef Litobarski says:

[April 24, 2009 at 13:10](#)

Hunting for EU election campaign ads has become a sport. 😊

What is the mood like in the Netherlands amongst the people you know personally? Will they all be voting? And if so, are they normally political types anyway?



Mats Siffels says:

[April 24, 2009 at 13:25](#)

Most people I know will go vote. I study European Studies, so for most of my study friends, not voting is not really an option; concerning friends from other studies, I think relating to non-voting university students are generally not the problem. As for my family and their friends, most of them too are engaged enough to make their way to the ballot, and thanks to me they also know to do so the 4th of June. I think the problem is they do not really know what they're voting for in a European context. I think most will vote along with parties they agree with on a national level (unless they base their vote on my advise :P). If you ask me, currently the candidates are doing a lackluster job at "spreading the word". Of course, you cannot blame this all on their efforts: I strongly suspect the budget for these elections is much more constrained than it would be for national elections, and most of the candidates still have their normal daily affairs to deal with. In all aspects, these European elections look like secondary elections.



Mats Siffels says:

[April 24, 2009 at 13:39](#)

"Hunting for EU election campaign ads has become a sport. "

We should make a place to post all our sightings. Would be a fun bunch to see all together. I'm not sure if you are familiar with the probably quite expensive installations the EP is littering Europe with, I'll look if I can find a picture of one of them, it didn't take too long before the one in Budapest was covered with graffiti.



Josef Litobarski says:

[April 24, 2009 at 20:38](#)

I'm on a European Studies course as well (in Italy). I have no idea how many of my fellow students will be voting... I imagine most of them. Perhaps I should do a quick poll and find out.

As for "Election poster hunting"... I haven't found a single poster yet. It's not even a secondary election in Italy... it's a non-election (at least, in the North).

In contrast: I'm being overwhelmed by LOCAL election posters. And flyers, campaign vans, rallies, etc, etc.



Blaaf says:

[April 24, 2009 at 21:26](#)

I, too, was disappointed by the lack of European debate in Pauw & Witteman. Having said that there has been some interesting European related guests on the show "recently": Guy Verhofstadt (which gave some interesting insight about Council of EU) and Neelie Kroes, twice, since the crisis has started about the Crisis.

Erm... well three is not a lot I suppose but it's better than some (dare I even say it?) most countries.

And the NOS Europe blog and European election site has been fairly interesting so far.

Having said that it's quite worrying that they haven't set a date for the debate, I have a feeling it will get postponed indefinitely.



Mats Siffels says:

[April 24, 2009 at 22:53](#)

@josef: Interesting. I basically assumed all my fellow students would vote since all we have done for the past three years is theorizing about the EU and its policies. If you decide to proceed with your poll: keep us posted. I will see if I can get a Flickr online where everybody can share his/her sightings.

@blaat: the NOS site is my starting page. I do not think the problem lies with the availability of information. A little surfing delivers plenty of results. However, this requires an effort from the (potential) voter; an effort only those already interested will make. For others to get involved they should come across it while going to the supermarket, watching the television or reading their newspaper.

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