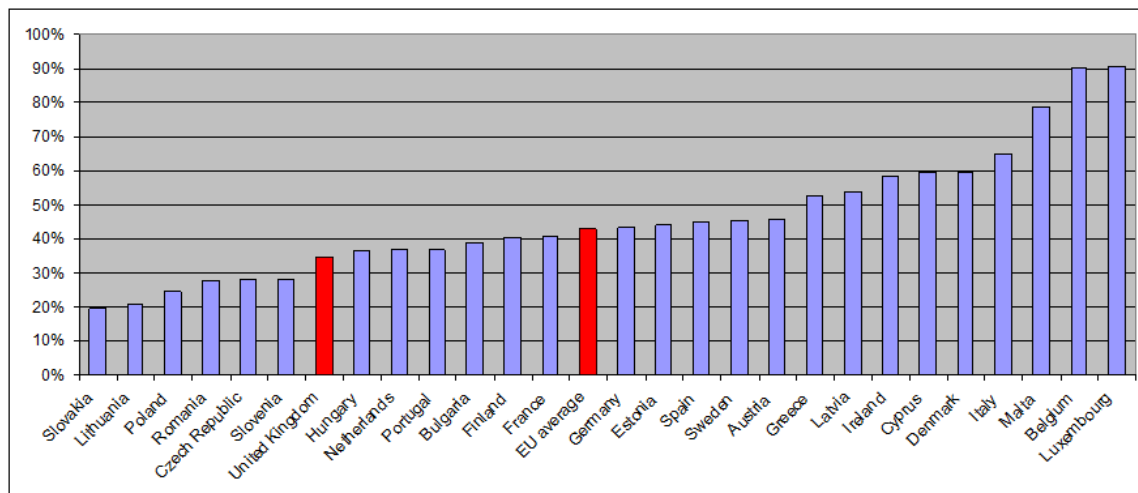


## The results of the European elections 2009

Every five years, the citizens of the European Union go to the polls to elect their members of the European Parliament. This is the only international election that takes place anywhere in the world, and as such is surely one of the seven wonders of the democratic world. If there was more voting and less fighting, the world would be a better place indeed.

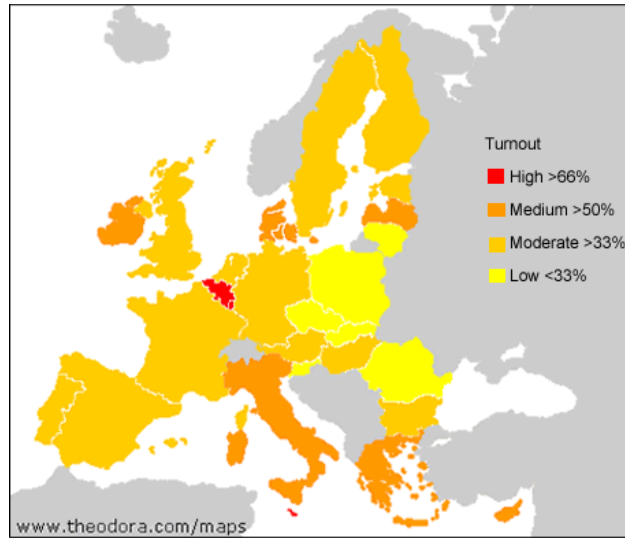
The latest elections were held from 4 to 7 June 2009. What were the results? And what do they mean for the future of Britain and Europe?

### (1) Turnout



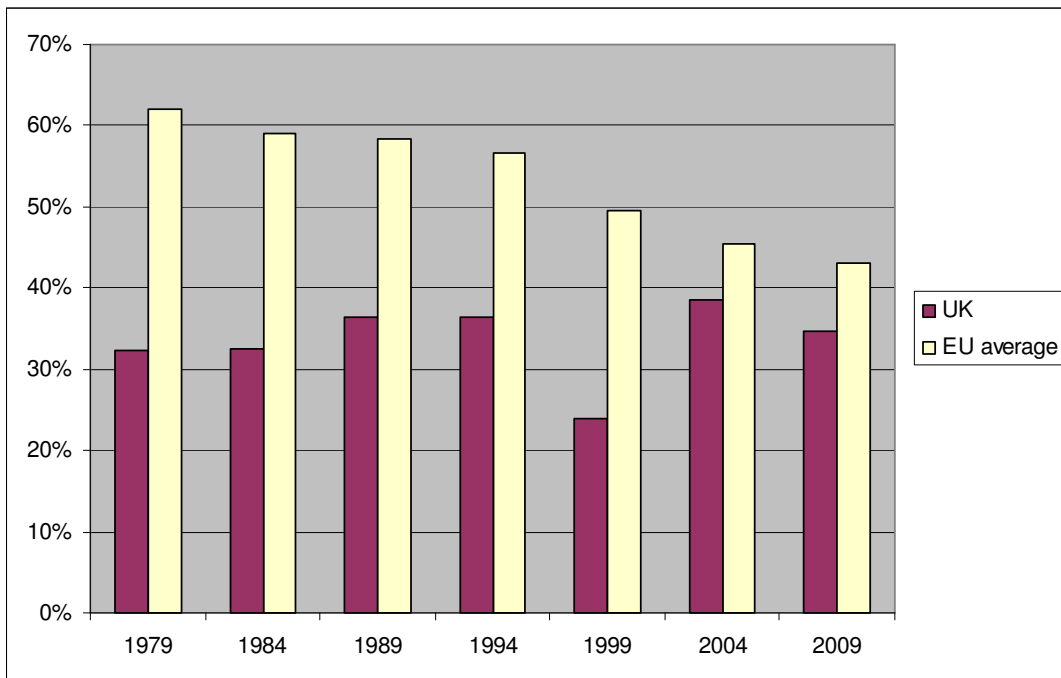
We start with looking at the turnout in the elections. This is often taken as an indicator of the popularity or the relevance of the elections, or the European Union as a whole, in the lives of the citizens. The average turnout in the European Union was 43%, but it varied greatly from as high as 90.8% (in Luxembourg) to as low as 19.6% (in Slovakia). The UK saw a turnout of 34.7%, below the European average but not uniquely so.

## (2) Turnout across Europe



A look at the distribution of turnout in different countries in Europe does not show any strong geographic pattern. Perhaps the most definitive thing that can be said is that the countries with the lowest turnout (below 33%) were all in the former Communist east, and are coping with a range of questions that democratic and economic transition brings with it.

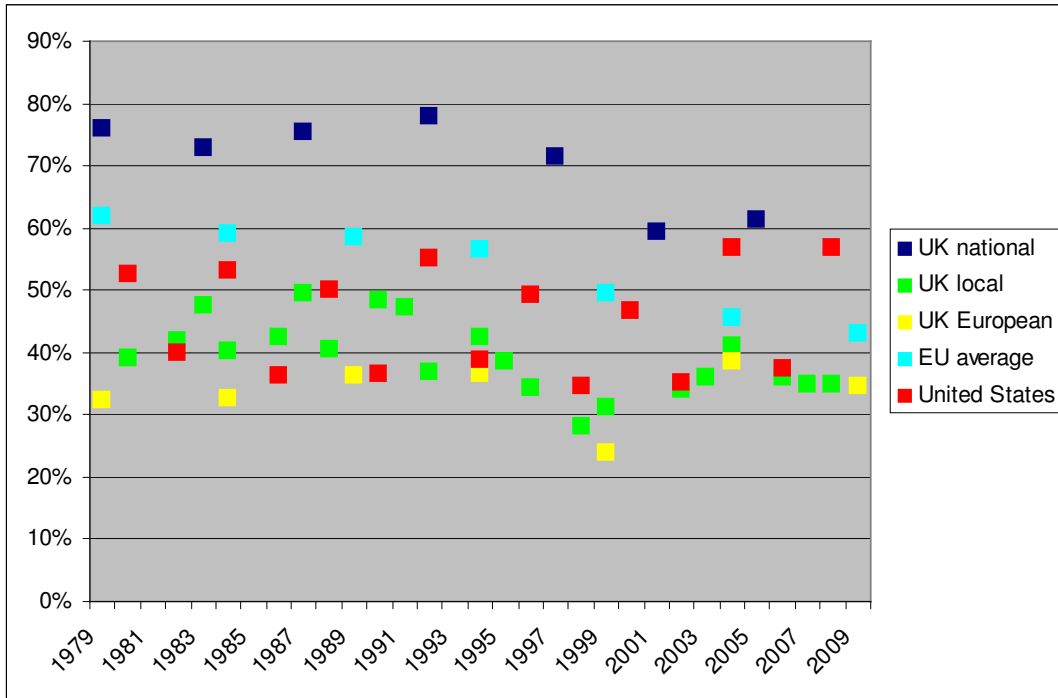
## (3) Decline in turnout over the years



The elections in 2009 were the seventh set of European elections to be held. During that period of 30 years, turnout has fallen on each occasion, from a high of 62.0% in 1979. Turnout in the UK has followed a rather different pattern, being now higher than it was in

1979 (although lower than in 2004). This could be taken as an indicator of how the British debate about Europe differs from that in the rest of Europe.

**(4) Turnout comparisons**

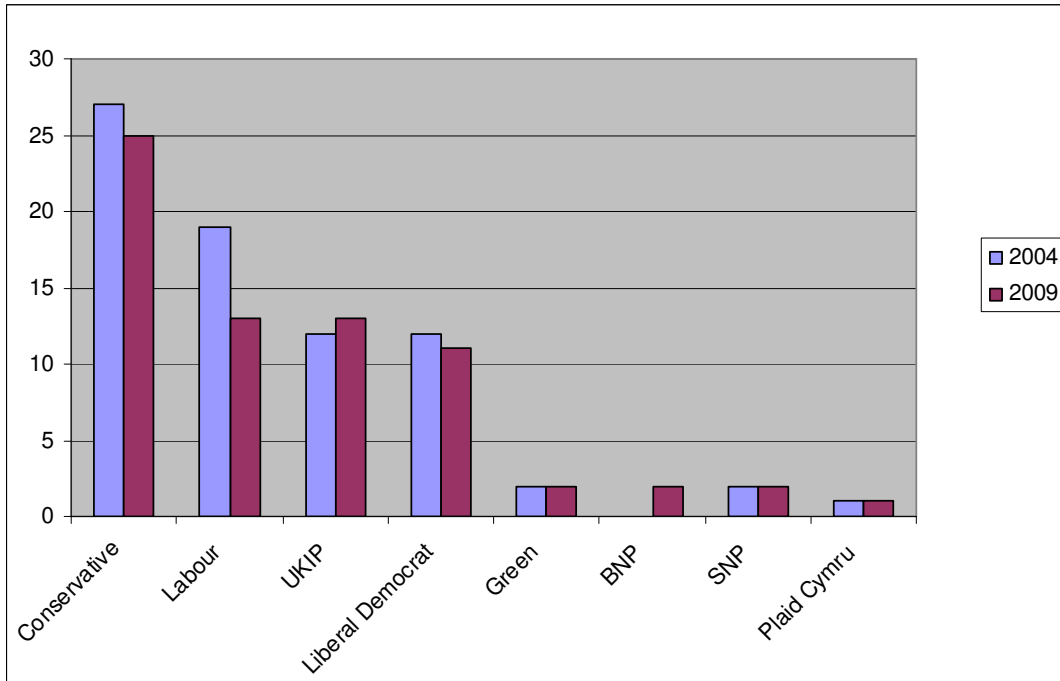


In thinking about the decline in turnout in the European elections over the years, it is worth looking at other elections to see how they compare. Turnout in the UK general election has declined steadily over the last 30 years, too, and has been typically around 15 percentage points above the average European election turnout. UK local election turnouts have remained around 40%, that is to say only slightly higher than UK turnouts in European elections.

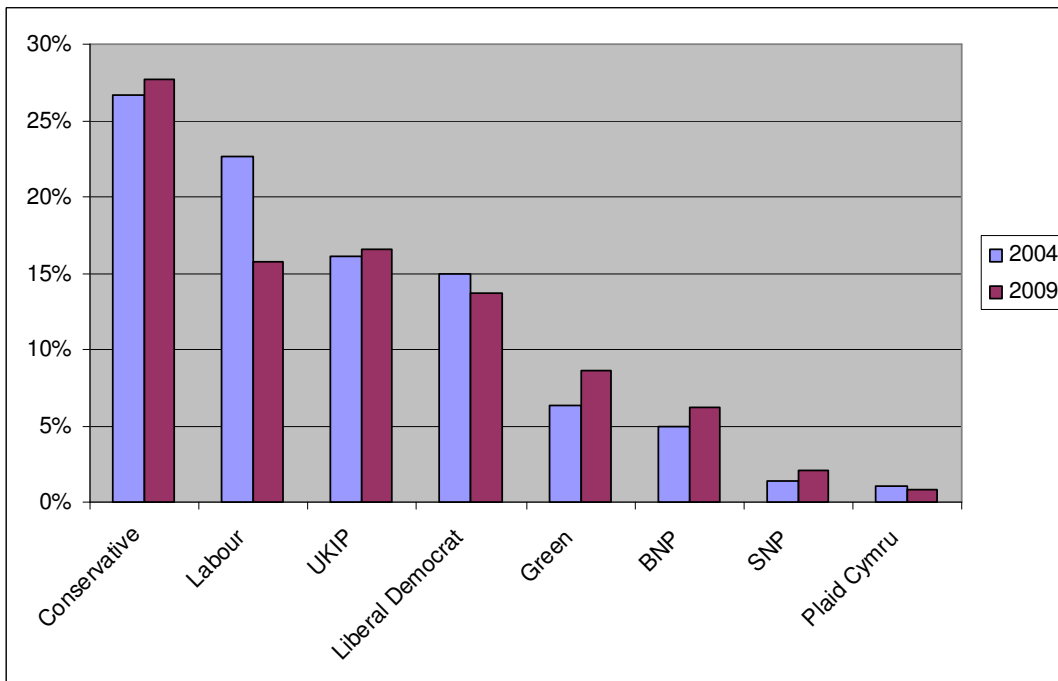
It should be noted that in the United States, turnouts (for the congressional elections) have actually been lower than those in the European Union. Also, turnouts in congressional elections are 10 to 15 percentage points higher in years when there is also a presidential election taking place: the idea that the shape of the executive is at stake as well as the legislature seems to encourage more people to vote.

**(5) Great Britain results: seats**

Let us move on from turnout – how many people voted – to the actual results themselves. The number of seats in Great Britain fell from 75 to 69 because of the impact of enlargement, so a general decline was to be expected. (We look at Great Britain only, because Northern Ireland has its own separate party system and a different electoral system to boot.) In fact, Labour lost 6 seats and fell to only 13, equal with UKIP. Beyond that, there was little overall change in seat numbers or balance.

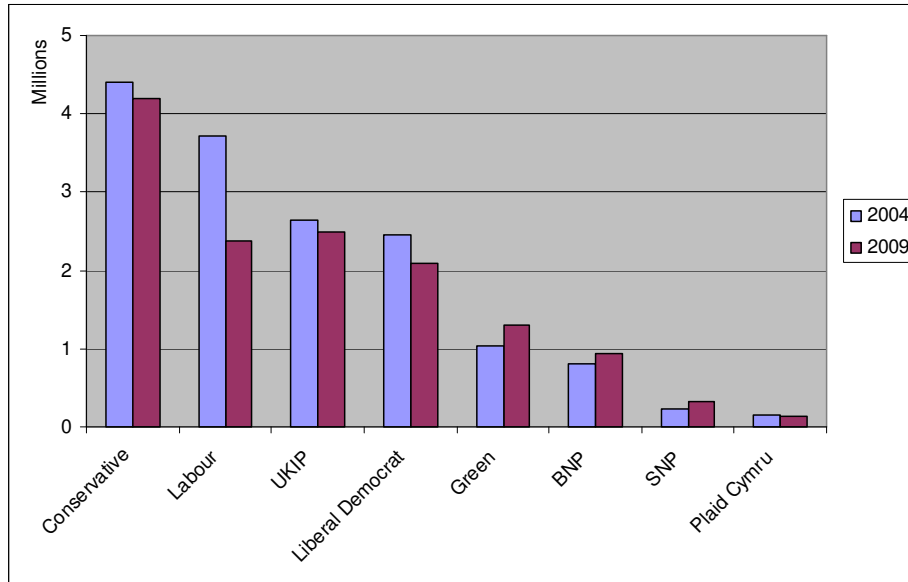


**(6) Great Britain results: vote share**



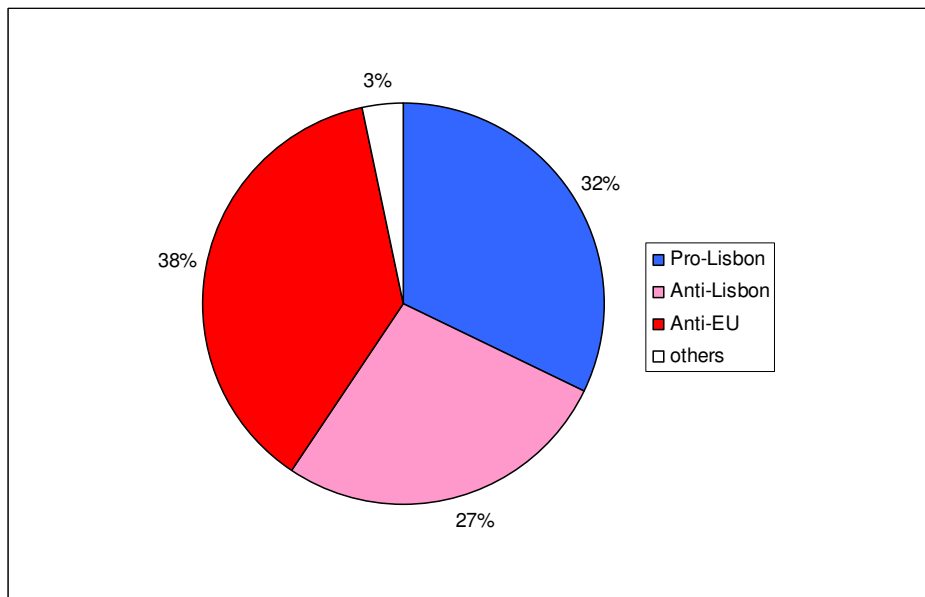
The European elections are conducted under a form of proportional representation, so overall vote share mirrors the number of seats won quite closely. Labour's vote share fell as far as 15.7%, its worst national election result since 1918, while the Conservative vote share went up by 1 percentage point to 27.7%. The smaller parties that have no representation in the House of Commons under its first past the post electoral system all saw gains in their share of the vote.

**(7) Great Britain results: votes**



A combination of the vote share and the turnout produces quite an interesting picture in terms of the number of votes cast for each party. Labour lost a lot of votes, of course, with a 36% fall since the last elections in 2004. But the Conservatives and UKIP also gained fewer votes than last time, losing 4.6% and 5.8% respectively. This suggests that their electoral success is fuelled by disconnection from the European Union as much as actual hostility towards it.

**(8) UK balance of opinion on the Lisbon treaty**



Given the topicality of the debate about the Lisbon treaty and the demands for a referendum on the issue, it is worth looking at the overall balance of opinion on the subject, as reflected

by the votes cast for the different parties. (This time, including Northern Ireland, because it would take part in any UK referendum on Europe.) Pro-Lisbon parties gained 32% of the vote, as opposed to 65% cast for parties opposed to the Lisbon treaty. Within that anti-Lisbon block, though, as much as 38% of the total vote was cast for parties opposed to EU membership altogether. This is without doubt the most Eurosceptic election result in British history, and arguably, given that some of the anti-Lisbon candidates are also opposed to EU membership too, there was an anti-EU majority in a UK election for the first time since the EEC was first created in the 1950s.

**(9) Europe as an electoral asset**

Anti-Lisbon:	Conservative	UKIP	Green	BNP
	+ 1.0%	+ 0.3%	+ 2.4%	+ 1.3%
Pro-Lisbon:	Labour	Liberal Democrat	SNP	Plaid Cymru
	- 6.9%	- 1.2%	+ 0.7%	- 0.1%

Looking at the difference in fortunes of the pro- and anti-Lisbon parties, we see something very striking. Every single one of the anti-Lisbon parties saw its vote share go up; with one exception, every single one of the pro-Lisbon parties saw its vote share go down. The exception on the pro-Lisbon side was the Scottish National party, which emphasised in its campaign its support for a referendum on the treaty (without mentioning so clearly which way it would vote) and which has styled itself as the opposition to Labour in Scotland. The notion that there is a pro-European establishment in Britain is firmly on the retreat.

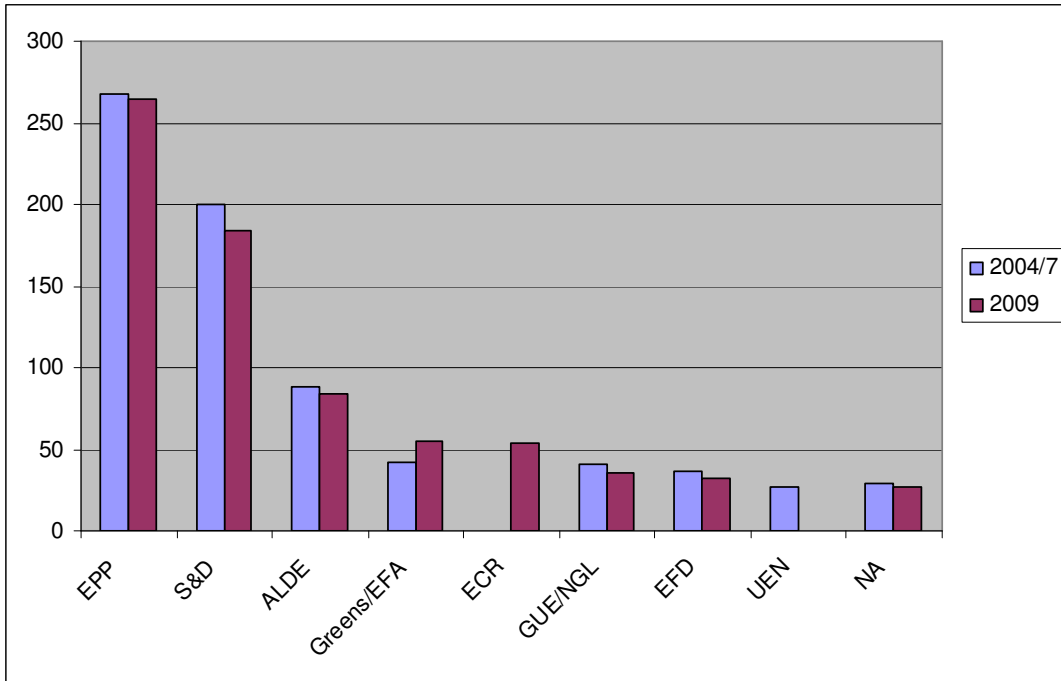
**(10) BNP electoral success and electoral failure**

The British National party did well in the elections. Its vote share went up by 1.3 percentage points to 6.2%, its total number of votes went up 16.8% to 943,598, and it won, for the first time, 2 MEPs. A geographical examination of the result, though, reveals a different picture.

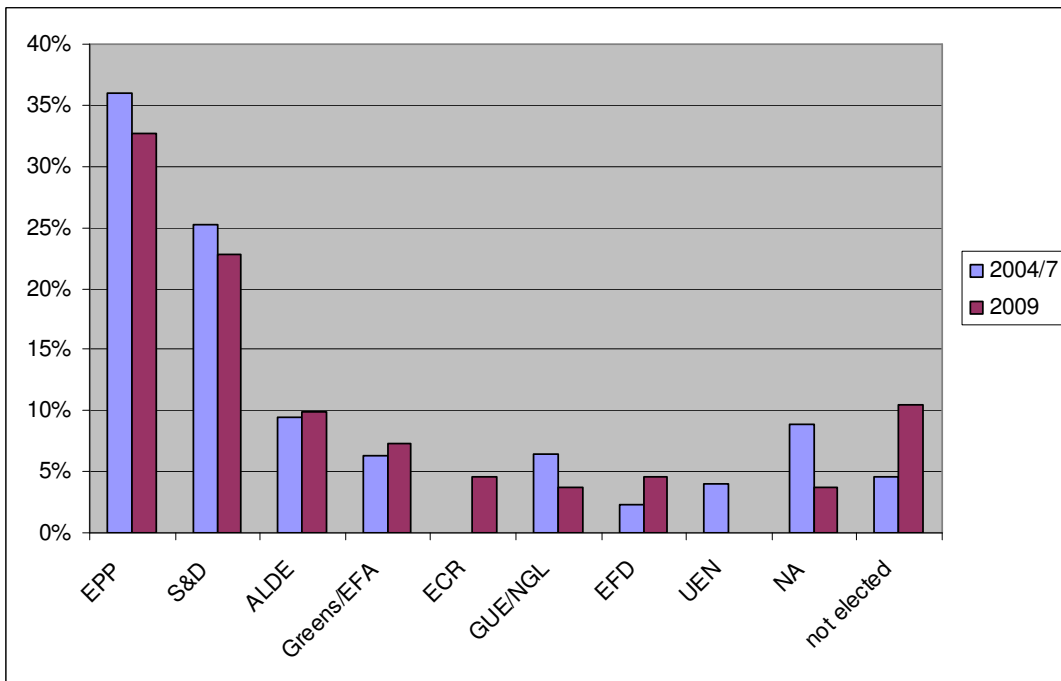
In the nine regions of Great Britain where the BNP did not win a seat, its total vote went up by 26.5%. However, in the two regions where it did get somebody elected, its total vote in fact went down by 3.5%. (It won seats was because the vote of the Labour party declined even faster.) This decline in the vote is because those two regions were the location of the most vigorous activity by the BNP's dedicated opponents, such as the Hope not Hate campaign. It shows that racism in politics can be resisted if there is a determined effort to do so.

**(11) European Union results: seats**

The overall distribution of seats in the European Parliament did not change very much after the elections in June 2009. The biggest single change appears to be the sudden emergence of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, composed mainly of British Conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice party. But in fact, it largely fills the niche previously occupied by the UEN, another centre-right group with nationalist and eurosceptic tendencies. The creation of the ECR will probably make more difference in Britain than in the EU as whole.



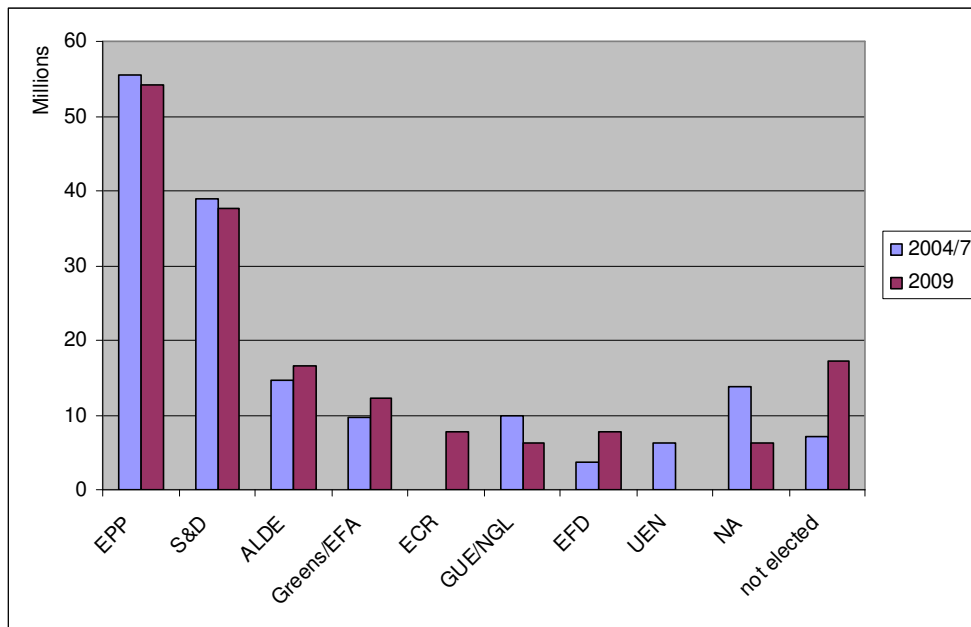
**(12) European Union results: vote share**



There are no official figures published on vote share by European party group. The data in the chart above has been compiled from an analysis of national reports of voting records. In a complicated picture, there was a swing of about 1.9% from left to right, with a decline in the vote share of the Socialists (S&D) and the far left (GUE/NGL) of 2.5 and 2.7 percentage points respectively. The decline in the Christian Democrat (EPP) vote is accounted for by the loss of the British Conservative party, who are now part of the ECR group. The growth in the

anti-EU EFD vote, which includes UKIP, is due to its acquisition of the Italian Lega Nord party, which is not only opposed to a united Europe but even to a united Italy. Lastly, note that the proportion of the votes cast for parties that did not achieve representation in the European Parliament doubled. This indicates an increasing fragmentation of politics and suggests a growing popular disengagement from the European Union as a functioning political institution.

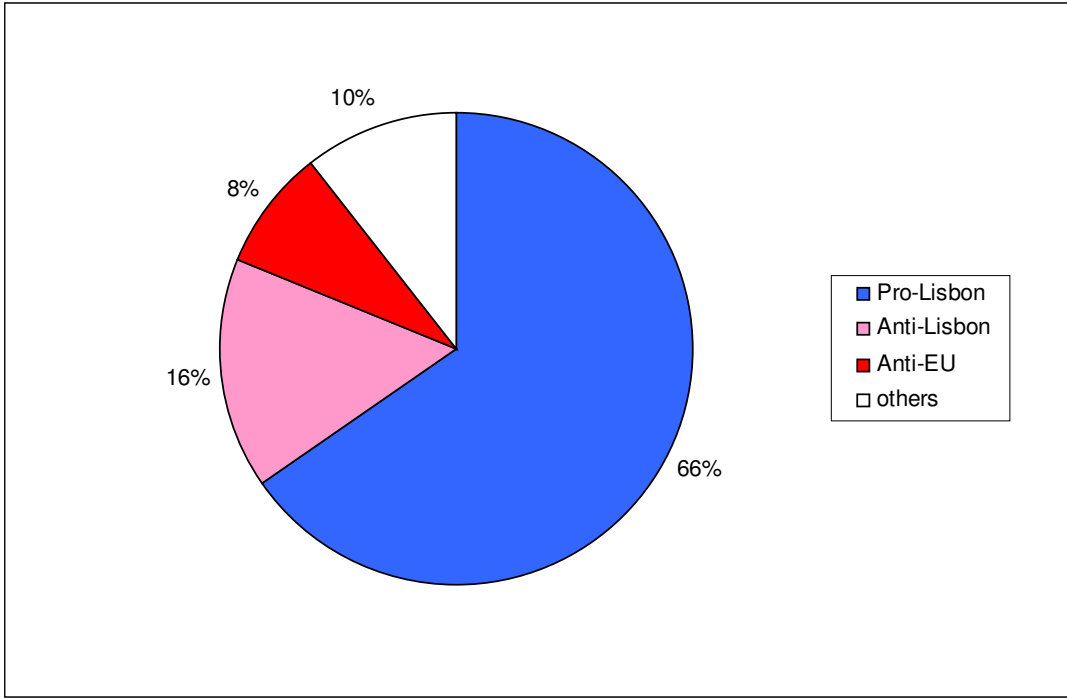
**(13) European Union results: votes**



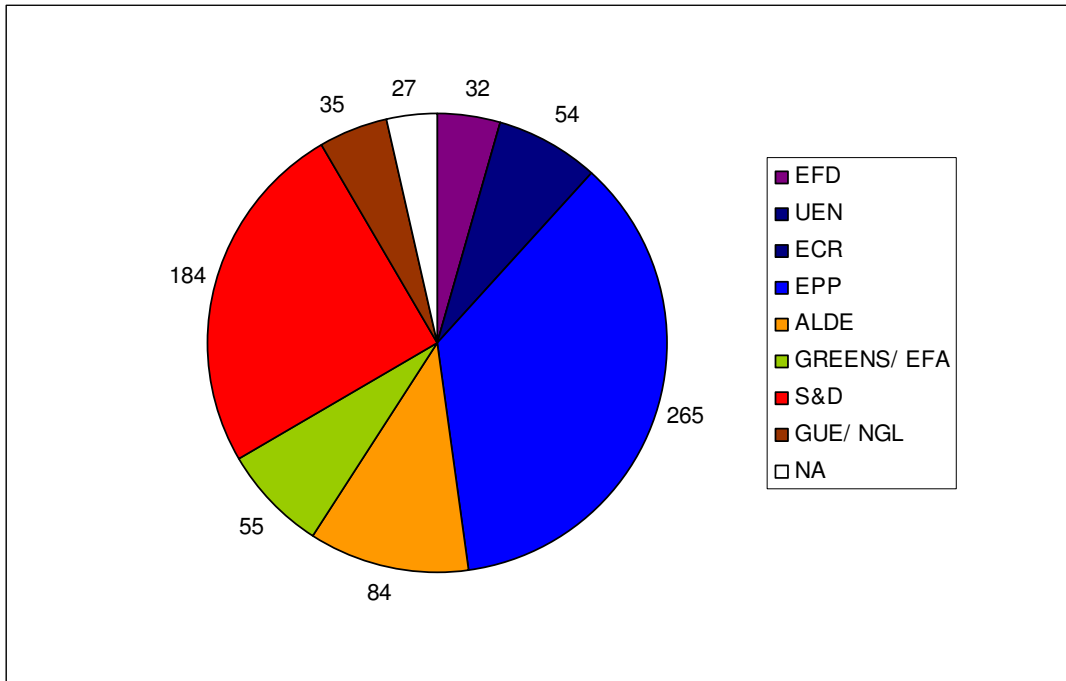
The larger parties saw a decline in the number of votes they received, whereas the smaller parties saw growth. This is consistent with the general idea of fragmentation and disengagement that we noted earlier.

**(14) EU balance of opinion on the Lisbon treaty**

The balance of opinion in the EU overall on the Lisbon treaty is very different from that found in the UK (see figure 8 above). On the basis of the votes cast in the 27 member states together, the treaty has majority support. However, the data on turnout (in figure 1) shows that the EU still has to work hard for public involvement, even if there is no outright objection to the way it is structured.



**(15) Balance in the new European Parliament**



The very small change in the distribution of votes has left the party balance in the new European Parliament largely unchanged. The EPP remains the largest party group but far short of a majority. The next five year in the EP will be dominated by coalition building and compromise. Interestingly, an EPP/ALDE/ECR group would muster a small majority (403 as against to 333) but, as we have seen when looking at the electoral swing, the politics of the

European Union does not lend itself to a simple left-right cleavage. (If the Lisbon treaty is ratified, there will be a further 18 MEPs taking seats in the EP, but this will not affect the overall party balance.)

#### **(16) New MEPs**

A few facts about the MEPs themselves. It is calculated that 56% of MEPs are new to the European Parliament this time (although some of them might have served in the period before 2004). This is a larger proportion than was first announced immediately after the poll, because in some countries famous politicians stand for election in order to attract publicity and votes while intending to pass their seats on to somebody else.

From the point of view of gender balance, the European Parliament will look a little more like Europe itself: the proportion of women MEPs has risen from 31% last time to 35%.

#### **(17) The results of some anti-EU parties**

Finally, some good news. In Poland, the pro-European party of the centre right, Civic Platform, gained 44% of the vote and 25 seats, while its eurosceptic rival, Law and Justice, won only 27% of the vote and 15 seats. Poland appears to have turned a corner in its recent attitude towards Europe.

And in Ireland, the businessman Declan Ganley failed to win a seat at the head of his anti-EU Libertas party. He had imagined that he could repeat his success in the first referendum on the Lisbon treaty. In fact, his party won only 5.4% of the vote and no seats at all.

#### **(18) Conclusions**

To draw some conclusions from this analysis, one can say first of all for the EU as a whole that there was a small swing from left to right, but also, and possibly more importantly, a swing from large parties to small parties. Coupled with a decline in turnout, this suggests that the European electoral process still has some way to go to establish its credibility in the eyes of the voters.

In the UK, one can go further. The substantial majority of votes cast for parties opposed to the Lisbon treaty and the turnout even lower than the EU average give encouragement to the eurosceptics that they are currently winning the argument. It falls to the parties and the organisations in favour of Lisbon and the process of European integration to see if they can, in the future, reverse this trend. If they cannot, there is a likely and unfortunate outcome in sight.

RACL  
12.9.09