

Long report on ELF Seminar ‘Vote Vote Vote – Exploring European Electoral Systems’

Zagreb, Croatia 16-18/2/2018

The European Parliament elections are coming up in 2019, and the political parties and their youth organisations are starting to prepare for the campaigns. The list of electoral systems that are used in Europe is, however, as diverse as our union in every other aspect. And different systems might require different campaign tactics.

Therefore, there was a need to explore and compare different electoral systems (Closed list, SVT or preferential voting) used in the elections to the European Parliament, and how different systems affect campaigning. A relevant matter is what system would be best for the transnational (pan-European) lists that hopefully will be introduced in the future.

In order to explore them, 30 young liberals from all over Europe gathered in Zagreb for an ELF event, co-organized by LYMEC and the International Educational Center. This workshop included sessions with experts on the different topics, as well as contributions from the participants themselves. The participants had to write an essay in order to partake in the seminar. These essays were presented during the event and will later be part of a publication. The audience was diverse, including people from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Serbia, Ukraine and the UK.

The event kicked off on Friday 16 with a welcome speech by LYMEC bureau member, Kevin Tammearu and IEC President, Goran Neralić. Tammearu briefed the participants about the general theme of the event and the expected course. Some ground rules were put in place - in particular the use of #elfevent in social media. He then introduced Goran from the local organisers, who welcomed the participants to Zagreb and gave a brief background into his organisation. After the introduction by Goran and Kevin, it was time for the participants to introduce themselves and give a sample of their essay. They spoke about the topic of their essay, broke down some of their main points and later also provided an interesting example or two.

Later in the evening, Professor David Farrell, Head of School of Politics and International Relations in University College Dublin gave a very thorough look into the electoral systems across Europe, with the focus on how member states elect their MEPs. Farrell presented the types of electoral systems, the differences and similarities between them and which is used in most democracies around the world. He then presented the electoral systems for national and European elections historically and how they evolved and with emphasis given on the effort for greater uniformity. Farrell then argued on the impact the different electoral systems have on types and styles of representation. He concluded the presentation by categorizing the systems according to whether they are party or candidate based whether they are categorical or ordinal. He also made some quick remarks on some action points the EP should adopt in the future.



On Saturday morning, Sissel Kvist, Svenja Hahn and Danica Vihinen, LYMEC President, Vice President and Secretary General respectively, gave brief examples on how the electoral system in their home countries work. Vihinen explained the system in Finland, while Kvist and Hahn in Denmark and Germany respectively. Hahn demonstrated a video and after that, a Q&A session followed. The participants also gave examples of their countries.

LYMEC bureau member, Sergiou Boghean discussed the impact the electoral systems can have on political campaigning together with the participants. In a round table discussion, the participants shared their experience which varied from door to door campaigning and posters, flyers or social media, to even free giveaways and bribes as a result of corruption. Boghean explained how the targeted audience may determine the strategy and the campaign techniques, whether for example the message targets the youth or older generations. The collection of data is also very important along with their analysis, in order to mobilize the society or split it. Big data plays a strengthened role together with privacy.

Vihinen then gave a short introduction on transnational lists. She began with a historical review, stated that the vote earlier that week in the EP had a negative result towards the adoption of the system and presented the views of Emmanuel Macron and Jean-Claude Juncker on the matter. Guy Verhofstadt's speech in the EP on transnational lists was then previewed and discussed.

On Saturday afternoon, NEOS International Officer, Stefan Windberger presented a radically new system to spice up the European elections, trying to find the 'electoral sweet spot', or in other words the ideal electoral system. At first, Windberger presented the two systems that have prevailed, proportional representation and majoritarian. In the form of an exercise, the participants tried to compile the pros and cons of each system and debate them, before Windberger summed them up.

He then presented a paper on 'Low-Magnitude Proportional Electoral Systems' by Carey and Hix. The participants were divided into five groups, going through the paper and summarizing the main idea behind it. They presented the results and stated their opinions in a constructive debate. After that, Windberger presented the Single Transferable Vote system and made the case that STV together with the 'Low-Magnitude Proportional Electoral Systems' could spice up European elections and increase the turnout. Coming from Austria, which is a federal state, he presented the country as a successful case study.

A discussion in smaller groups followed and then everybody presented the outcome of the event and their essays, stating whether or not they will make amendments based on the feedback they received. Hahn and Vihinen closed the event with a round table discussion and information regarding the essays and their future publication, while Kvist thanked everybody for participating.

To summarize the event, everybody concluded that there are divergent electoral systems and that is because of the differences between countries, cultures, history and people. This does not mean that one system is the best, but they all have their advantages and drawbacks. The general conclusion was that a Low-Magnitude Proportional Electoral System and the introduction of



the Single Transferable Vote and of Transnational Lists would bring us closer to an ‘ideal’ electoral system. This would mean small multimember districts — with median magnitude between four and eight seats— in all EU countries (and for the EP elections). This would result in minimizing the gap between the average citizen and their MP or MEP, wider representation including smaller parties and an additional layer of democratic participation for the European citizens.

