EUROBAROMETER QUALITATIVE STUDIES

‘IMPULSIVE’ AND ‘UNSPECIFIED’ ABSTAINERS: VOTING BARRIERS AND INCENTIVES

Covering: EU 27
Fieldwork carried out by TNS qual +
Focus groups conducted between 6 and 17 February 2012

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The present qualitative study was conducted in February 2012 in the 27 Member States of the EU. It focused on two categories of abstainers, as identified in the ‘desk research’ based on the results of the 2009 post-electoral survey. The two groups in question accounted for more than half (56%) of non-voters in the 2009 European elections:

- ‘Impulsive’ abstainers: individuals who decided not to vote just a few days before the election or, in some cases, on the day itself;

- ‘Unspecified’ abstainers: individuals who did not know when they had decided not to vote.

Q: ‘When did you decide not to vote in the recent European Parliament elections?’

To carry out the present qualitative study, three focus groups were recruited in every Member State among ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers. Each focus group lasted two hours, and consisted of non-voters falling into one of the following categories:

- ‘impulsive’ abstainers who did not vote in the last European elections but did vote in the most recent local/national elections;

- ‘impulsive’ abstainers who did not vote in the last European elections and also abstained from voting in local/national elections;

- ‘unspecified’ abstainers: people who did not vote in the European elections but did vote in the latest local/national elections.

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In countries where voter turnout in the European elections was high (BE, LU, MT), the composition of the focus groups was modified accordingly.

Although no specific rule was applied to the composition of focus groups, efforts were made to ensure gender balance and a balanced age mix, with every group comprising at least three men and three women.

The main objective of this qualitative survey is to produce a more in-depth analysis of the results of the post-electoral survey of the 2009 European elections while identifying the factors which discouraged people from voting as well as incentives which might encourage potential voters to vote in the European elections.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

- Methodological complementarity between the post-election ‘desk-research’ and the present qualitative study:

The ‘desk-research’ identified four types of abstainers based on the results of the Eurobarometer-European Parliament quantitative survey which was conducted between 12 June and 6 July 2009 (on the basis of face-to-face interviews with 26 830 European citizens).

The qualitative survey recruited in each Member State, between 6 and 17 February 2012, 3 focus groups composed of between 8 and 12 interviewees. The groups were not intended to be representative of the whole population. The objective was to better understand the reasons behind this kind of voting behaviour.

- Time lapse between these two studies:

The reader will find in the ‘desk research’ that there are some differences between the main reasons for failing to vote given in 2009 by ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers. The 2012 qualitative survey indicates, however, that these two types of non-voters cited the same reasons in the course of the focus groups. It is likely that the passage of time affected participants’ recollection of their reasons for not voting.

In addition, the participants in the focus groups also discussed their perception of the crisis and the way it was being managed both at Member State and European Union level. The influence of the crisis on voting behaviour was also discussed.

CONCLUSION: CORE MESSAGES

⇒ Participants overwhelmingly felt that **more information on the economy, employment and health issues** would definitely make people more likely to vote.

⇒ Among ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ groups of non-voters, **the main barrier to voting in the European elections** was **lack of knowledge of/information about the candidates and the European Parliament in general**. The low turnout was not down to lack of interest in politics or an unwillingness to actually make the journey to the polling station.

⇒ **With these qualitative findings in mind, the three interconnected issues below could usefully form the basis for public communication campaigns:**

  – What does the European Parliament do?

  – What do MEPs do? Who are the candidates?

  – How does this relate directly to people’s lives?

⇒ On the assumption that individuals also act as ‘rational voters’ (i.e. they take the trouble to vote if the benefits they hope to gain from doing so outweigh the ‘costs’ of voting), **cutting the cost of obtaining information** (which should be presented on an ongoing basis, concise, concrete, clear, instructive and relevant) **could also help boost the perceived benefits of voting in the European elections** and the feeling that ‘my vote counts’.

⇒ **This qualitative study provides a framework for future quantitative surveys to be carried out in preparation for the EE14 (2014 European elections) institutional campaigns (by identifying the various factors that influence potential voters, updating and quantifying these segments of the electorate):**

  – citizens’ **knowledge** (objective and subjective) about the EU, the European Parliament and candidates for election to the EP;

  – citizens’ **interest** in politics (in general) and in the EU;

  – citizens’ **sense of ‘Europeanness’** and their ability to make the connection between the European Parliament’s work and their own lives (closeness to the EU);

  – citizens’ **exposure to media** carrying relevant content (including the information environment surrounding participants) could also be considered.
I. REASONS FOR NOT VOTING: ‘IMPULSIVE’ AND ‘UNSPECIFIED’ ABSTAINERS

⇒ There is no fundamental difference between ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers.

⇒ The two groups largely share the same reasons for not voting during the 2009 European elections, with lack of knowledge and lack of information being the main barriers to voting. These non-voters have no clear idea of what the European Parliament and its Members do, who the candidates standing for election as MEPs are, and how the European Parliament and the EU in general directly relate to their everyday lives.

⇒ In this respect, ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers do not express a lack of confidence in politics generally or distrust of the EU, as can be the case with ‘unconditional’ and ‘considered’ non-voters.

⇒ Consequently, one positive finding of the qualitative study is that the main reason why ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers failed to vote was NOT down to a lack of interest in politics.

These ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers are interested in politics but feel that they do not know enough about the European Parliament or the candidates standing for election as MEPs.

⇒ Focus group participants maintained that making voting arrangements more flexible (e.g. by introducing e-voting, extending the opening hours of polling stations, etc.) would not make them more likely to vote.

A. Knowledge about the European elections: what does the European Parliament do, what do MEPs do, and how does the European Parliament relate to people’s lives?

⇒ Demand for positive information: there is a sense that information about the European Parliament is not always circulated widely enough, and some participants expressed the desire for more information, especially of a positive nature.

Many feel that there is insufficient media coverage of the European Parliament, and that coverage is not balanced: the approach is too negative – there is not enough positive reporting and there are not enough first-hand accounts of the positive role played by Parliament. Furthermore, the media should not focus solely on the more dominant countries, such as Germany and France.

- Lack of understanding of what the EU institutions do: participants used ‘European Union’ and ‘European Parliament’ interchangeably or had difficulty distinguishing between the different EU institutions.
Inability to establish a direct link between the EU level and the individual level: there was widespread recognition of Parliament’s lawmaking role at European level, although focus group participants were not very knowledgeable about it.

(a) **Difficulty in directly linking the EU level with the individual level without passing through the national level:** approximately one third of focus group participants in the Member States regarded Parliament as more important for their country than it was for them, as the legislation that Parliament adopted applied at national level and so involved their country, as a Member State of the European Union.

(b) **Sense that the European Parliament only deals with minor issues:** participants felt that the matters Parliament dealt with were not always important or relevant to people’s lives.

(c) **Unfavourable perception of political representation:** participants from a quarter of the Member States took the view that Parliament represented the interests of the larger, longer-established Member States with more MEPs, and that their countries were under-represented.

Three main reasons for these negative perceptions:

(a) **A lack of knowledge** about Parliament and how it works;

(b) **The context in which Parliament is presented in the media** – i.e. in a negative light, rather than on the basis of substantive information being provided about the institution. ‘You never hear about their work and what they have accomplished. You only hear about disputes and disagreements;’

(c) Participants felt that some regulations and directives had had adverse effects on their country;

B. **The European elections are still perceived as ‘second-class’ elections: how do the elections relate to people’s daily lives?**

⇒ ‘Impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ non-voters show an interest in politics, but feel that their vote ‘does not count’.

⇒ Create direct links between the EU and citizens’ lives by improving communication about the tangible impact of legislation.

Of the choices they were given in the qualitative study with regard to their reasons for not voting, ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers disagreed most with the statement that ‘politics is of no interest and voting is a hassle’.

⇒ In this respect, ‘impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers were not characterised by mistrust of politics in general.

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4 Politics is of no interest; Local and national elections are more important than European ones; Voting is a hassle; I don’t know enough about it; It’s difficult to know who to vote for; My vote doesn’t make a difference.
However, one of the reasons that they cited for not having voted in the 2009 European elections was doubt as to whether their vote would affect the final outcome of the elections.

→ In this sense they felt that voting would not make a difference.

(a) Perception of the consequences of voting in the European elections: the general idea that emerged was that the more directly people are affected by elections, the more interested they are and the more willing they are to vote (in local and national elections, for example).

Participants could not see how voting in European elections was beneficial to them as individuals. They did, however, have a clearer idea of the link between the European and national levels, and how that related to the electoral issues at stake. But they were not always able to see a direct link between voting in European elections and their own daily lives.

(b) Some participants were more negative towards the EU in general as a result of the financial crisis, and did not see how their vote could make a difference to it at European level.

(c) Social pressure: as participants did not feel particularly involved in and knowledgeable about European elections, they felt no need to vote and were not concerned about the consequences of not voting. Some argued that it was better not to vote than to make an uninformed choice.

→ Therefore they feel less guilty about not voting in European elections than they would about not voting in national elections.

C. Knowledge about MEPs/candidates: who are the MEPs and what do they do? For whom should I vote? Which political platform should I support?

⇒ Knowledge of candidates is a crucial factor in the decision whether or not to vote

⇒ Need to raise the profile of the elections.

- Information about candidates and their manifestos: not knowing who to vote for is one of the major reasons for not voting.

Participants generally regarded voting as a duty and a right. In the majority of cases, however, not voting was considered to be an appropriate thing to do when one did not know for whom to vote, so as to avoid voting for the wrong person.
II. ATTITUDES TO THE EU AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Differing perceptions of the impact of European politics

⇒ The majority of focus group participants took the view that European politics affected their country; they were not always able to establish a direct link between European policies and their own lives, however.

⇒ Participants were not always able to distinguish clearly between the role of the European Parliament and other European institutions.

⇒ Nor were they always able to cite examples of how the European Parliament is or should be involved in these issues (see above, ‘Inability to establish a direct link between the EU level and the individual level’).

A. The key issues of interest to respondents: the economy, health and employment

• THE ECONOMY:

The economy is the area where the role of the European Parliament is regarded as most visible and as having a direct effect on focus group participants. Some felt that Parliament did play a role in the economy, but were unable to clearly articulate how. Others were able to give examples (both positive and negative) of the effect of the activities of the EU or of the European Parliament on the economy:

– An increase in foreign investment after joining the EU
– Parliament’s involvement in tackling the financial crisis and helping countries in need of assistance
– Interference in a country’s internal affairs and governance
– Imposition of general rules on how national economies should be run/pressure placed on national budgets by EU regulations
– A ban on monopolies leading to competitive prices
– The effect of open markets in terms of encouraging people from less-developed countries to take the jobs of people in more developed countries
– The effect of open markets in terms of enabling larger companies from other countries to buy smaller national firms
• EMPLOYMENT:

A majority of focus group participants regarded Parliament as playing an active role with regard to employment due to its concern with freedom of movement between the different Member States and enabling people to work and live in other countries.

Participants expressed differing views about the extent to which the European Parliament should be involved in addressing employment issues: some felt that it definitely should play a role, as employment was an issue that affected the EU as a whole, while others believed that employment issues were best addressed at national level.

It appeared that better information about what was being done on these issues at EU level would affect participants’ perceptions of the Union and the likelihood of their voting.

• HEALTH:

Healthcare was regarded as being very important to participants’ working and private lives. They stressed that it is often this area that is affected most severely by cuts in public spending. They also regarded it as falling within the field of national governments rather than the European Parliament.

While participants believed that Parliament’s work was relevant to various aspects of healthcare, some were uncertain as to whether it was involved in the following areas:

– The EU-wide anti-smoking policy
– Improving the health rights of women (maternity leave)
– Funding for the improvement of health infrastructure
– Mandatory vaccination for children
– The availability of generic medicines
– Strict rules for medicines and ingredient listing
– CE marking for toys

B. How is it possible to connect with these non-voters?

• The two main sources of information about Parliament cited by participants were traditional media (newspapers and television) and the internet.

• However, in at least one third of Member States, focus group participants said that they did not look for information about the European Parliament. They tended to be passive recipients of news (i.e. they followed the news because they had an interest and because it was available), rather than actively looking for information, which was:

– Too time-consuming
– Not interesting enough
– Participants felt that the information was inaccessible, and that the texts would be written in formal language that would be difficult to understand.
Information-framing

Participants overwhelmingly felt that more information on the three key issues of the economy, health and employment would definitely make people more likely to vote.

⇒ Participants also commented on the kinds of information that was required in order to increase the likelihood of their voting:

– *What the European Parliament is doing in a specific area that is important to them and how this relates to their lives.*
– *Why this type of policy was decided on and the timetable for implementing it.*
– *When can members of the public ask the European Parliament for help to address issues that they feel are important? What problems can it help to resolve?*

– *Information must be provided regularly and not just before an election.*
– *Information should be positive,* because many negative messages about Parliament and the EU are conveyed in the media.
– *Information should be objective and transparent and not subsumed by party politics.*
– *Information must be easy to understand and accessible.*

⇒ Communication design should be visible and attractive enough to stand out in a public domain that is saturated with messages. Participants had a number of ideas concerning the nature of this information, which they felt should be:

– presented on an ongoing basis;
– concise, concrete, clear and educational; relevant;
– non-party-political;
– interesting / not boring / fun/positive;
– factual and objective.

⇒ Participants also made various suggestions as to the best ways of presenting this information. The preferred method was television. Participants gave a number of examples of how information about Parliament could be communicated on television:

– regular TV broadcasting on a European theme
– a weekly television show: ‘The week in Parliament’
– as part of the main news bulletins every night
– TV debates during the election campaign
– live reports from the European Parliament
– TV discussions with candidates / interviews by journalists in which candidates explain what they do and what has been achieved
Mixed views about awareness-raising campaigns:

Some participants took the view that information could be factual and objective and could even include engaging directly with people.

However, others regarded awareness-raising campaigns as being very expensive and short-lived. In this sense, participants considered that such campaigns only partially fulfilled the need for regular, ongoing information about Parliament.

- Direct mail/leaflets were almost unanimously rejected by participants
- Canvassing (door to door / telephone) was also very unpopular
- Text messages and emails were also very unpopular. It was thought that text messages might be appropriate if they were used merely to remind people that elections were taking place.

Mixed views about the appropriateness of social media:

Some participants (especially among the younger generation) thought that it was entirely appropriate for Parliament to have a presence in the social media.

Other participants thought that it would not be appropriate for Parliament to present itself by this means on the grounds that that Parliament, as a serious international institution, should not resort to social media, which are used for entertainment purposes rather than political ones.

Some also expressed the view that social media information is not factual and objective.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES SUGGESTED/SUPPORTED BY THE FINDINGS

⇒ Highlighting the added value that Europe brings by stressing the impact that legislation has on people’s daily lives.

⇒ Stressing the concrete benefits of voting in the European elections: switching from an abstract/generalised conception of the consequences of voting in the European elections (EE) to a more concrete/focused one.

⇒ Recognising that knowledge of the candidates and information about the implications of the EE are crucial factors in the decision to vote.

⇒ Recognising the demand by participants for positive reporting about the EU to balance the negative reporting of the media.

⇒ Action to raise the profile of the elections.
III. VOTING INCENTIVES

As outlined above, the factors that would encourage impulsive’ and ‘unspecified’ abstainers to vote can be divided into three broad categories:

– HIGH IMPACT: Regular information about the European Parliament and MEPs, and about how Parliament’s work relates to people’s lives.

– MODERATE TO HIGH IMPACT: Changing electoral campaigns with a view to highlighting the suitability of candidates, raising the profile of the elections and clarifying electoral programmes.

– LOWER IMPACT: Provision of information about practical aspects of the voting process such as online voting, extended polling station opening hours and the timing of the elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention in the following area</th>
<th>Specifies</th>
<th>Why is this important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION</td>
<td>What does the European Parliament do?</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge about the EP’s work was the main reason why non-voters did not vote in 2009. In some instances a lack of information has contributed to negative perceptions about the EP, for example that it spends excessively and only focuses on insignificant issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do MEPs do?</td>
<td>Not knowing who the MEPs are and what they do was a main reason for not voting in the 2009 European election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does the European Parliament relate to people’s lives?</td>
<td>Participants are unable to clearly see how the EP’s work relates to their daily lives and therefore regard it as distant. This will also help people see what the impact of their vote might be. This might help address issues of apathy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mentioned by participants from: AT, BG, CZ, DK, EE, FR, FI, DE, HU, IE, LV, LT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, SE, UK, EL, CY, LU, BE, MT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention in the following area</th>
<th>The election of candidates</th>
<th>A lack of suitable candidates was regarded as a main reason for not voting in 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The election of candidates</strong></td>
<td>Voters should be able to choose who they want and not be as restricted in their choice as they currently are</td>
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<td>Candidates should be highly qualified in order to represent their countries at a European level and should also be known at national level</td>
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<tr>
<td>A better introduction to what candidates do</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do their planned activities differ from those of their predecessors in the EP?</td>
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<td>New and interesting candidates</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td>Mentioned by participants from: <strong>BG, CZ, EE, FI, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, RO, SI, ES, SE, UK, EL, CY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raise the profile of the elections</strong></td>
<td>Create ‘hype’ around it</td>
<td>This will make people more aware that the elections are taking place and what is at stake</td>
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<td>Popularise the election campaign and information about the EP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity on the election manifestos</strong></td>
<td>What are the truly European issues that are at stake in the campaign?</td>
<td>Participants thought there was insufficient information about the election manifestos of the different candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is it that the candidates stand for and intend to achieve, especially at a European level?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td>Mentioned by participants from: <strong>FR, HU, LV, PT, BE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE VOTING PROCESS</strong></td>
<td><strong>On-line voting via the Internet</strong></td>
<td>This might increase the participation of young people in elections. This might also help solve the inconvenience of having to go to a designated voting station which is a reason why some didn’t vote in 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making it easier to vote / greater voter flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extended voting periods</strong></td>
<td>For example voting over a number of days</td>
<td>This might increase participation as some participants had to travel over the election day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing of the elections</strong></td>
<td>Do not combine EP elections with national or local elections</td>
<td>This might lead to information overload and difficulty distinguishing between issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td>Mentioned by participants from: <strong>LV, LU</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

A. Perceptions of the EU

- The participants’ view of the EU had become more negative since the beginning of the current crisis. For the majority of participants, the crisis had changed the way they feel about the EU generally as well as their view of European institutions.

  ➢ Majority views:

  - The majority of participants felt that there was insufficient unity in the EU. They saw an element of inequality, with the biggest and more powerful countries taking decisions on behalf of the whole EU.

    - Some were disappointed with the way in which the crisis was being handled and by the lack of initiative and foresight evidenced by the failure to put in place the safeguards that could have averted the crisis.

  - The majority of participants took the view that the EU had an important role to play as an overall regulatory body. But a substantial number also felt that national governments should also have a role to play, in combination with the EU institutions.

    – There was also an impression that the crisis was being handled at the intergovernmental level (especially between France and Germany), i.e. between large countries rather than at EU level.

  - The majority of participants agreed that it was appropriate that the EU as a whole should help Member States that were facing financial difficulties:

    – Because a situation in which countries support one another is in line with the idea of a ‘union’ or ‘unity’.

    – It was also held that the health of one country affects the stability of the EU as a whole and that individual Member States therefore had an indirect interest in helping each other.

    - However, there was also strong support for the idea that financial help should be conditional, and countries should not ask for help unless it was really necessary.

  ➢ Minority views:

  - A minority of participants’ perceptions of the EU and its institutions had not changed. This could be the result of a lack of information about the extent of the crisis and the EU’s role.

  - A different minority of participants took the view that the EU had changed for the better; they recognised the value that the EU added by regulating matters and taking action at a supra-national level. They would welcome a more active role for the EU in dealing with the crisis.
– Other participants felt that their countries were **worse off as a result of being part of the EU.**

**NB: Credit rating agencies** – Most participants were aware of the existence of credit rating agencies (CRAs), but their understanding of what these agencies do varied considerably. In an overwhelming majority of cases, credit rating agencies were seen in a negative light for the following reasons: CRAs were not perceived to be truly independent; it was unclear where the CRAs’ authority emanated from; and CRAs were seen to have inflated the financial crisis → there was a sense that CRAs should be neutral and should be subject to some form of regulation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Influence on voting behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants were divided on whether they thought the current financial crisis would make them more or less likely to vote in the next European election:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– In approximately <strong>one third of Member States, the findings of the focus group indicate that the crisis might make participants more likely to vote,</strong> especially as they had been able to see the effects of the EU in their personal lives and the crisis had aroused their interest in EU politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– In approximately <strong>one third of Member States, on the other hand, the crisis might make participants less likely to vote.</strong> The two main reasons for this are that participants felt that their vote was unlikely to make a difference, and they believed that the crisis was not being handled satisfactorily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– In the remaining <strong>third of Member States, the crisis would apparently have no impact whatsoever on participants’ voting behaviour.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

NB: Although the focus groups were not about the crisis – they were about voting behaviour - there were a few questions about the crisis at the end of the discussion guide. The table below tries to link the interventions identified as having an impact on voting behaviour to the wider economic issues and the crisis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specifics</th>
<th>What does the EP do?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The economy is an area where the role of the EP is regarded as most visible. Although there were participants who felt that the EP does play a role in the economy, but were unable to clearly articulate how, others were able to give examples (both positive and negative) of the effect of the EU or EP in the economy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both the economy and employment were included among the top three issues that are of importance to participants and affect them the most. Employment was of concern to participants because of the effect that the financial crises has had on increasing the levels of unemployment and what they have seen happen in countries that have been most affected. Participants were also concerned about wage levels compared to other EU Member States.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘When you are a wage earner in the middle part of Europe, you are able to satisfy your elementary needs and you have enough money left to go to a concert, theatre, travelling, anywhere. In Estonia, we barely make ends meet; you can buy your bread and that’s it.’ (Female, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in national elections, EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the reasons for some participants’ negative perceptions of the EP is the context in which participants hear about the Parliament in the media – reports focus on scandals, the debt crisis, excessive expenditure, or things that will affect people negatively, such as quotas (fishing quotas, for example), and not on positive aspects. These negative perceptions are exacerbated by their lack of knowledge about what the EP does.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Some participants were disappointed with the way in which the crisis is being handled by European institutions and in what they perceive as a lack of leadership and foresight to put in place the necessary safeguards so that the crisis could have been averted.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The majority of participants were of the view that the EU institutions do have an important role to play as an overall regulatory body, especially in light of the extent of the crisis. But a substantial number also felt that national governments should have a role to play too in combination with the EU institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do the EP and its functions fit into the broader operational structure of the EU?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants expressed some confusion over the role of the EP in tackling the crisis and often confused the Parliament with the Commission / other EU institutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘If at a time of crisis the European Union appeared and followed one course with the aim of getting out of this crisis in the best way possible then I would be impressed. At the moment there is no guiding principle.’ (Male, willing voter, LU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>‘You know, I’m a teacher, so I’m supposed to teach about the institutions of the European Union. But even I find it hard to understand and distinguish the different role of the various EU institutions.’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, CZ)</td>
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What are the long-term goals of the EP and EU?

Participants showed a general lack of detailed knowledge of what the EP stands for and does. They were therefore unclear about its long-term goals, including in areas such as the economy and employment which were important issues for them.

‘Well, we talked about the fact that it is important to vote. But at the same time we saw that very few of us knew what the European Parliament stands for. So it is better not to vote when you do not have enough information.’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, BG)

‘It was not explained; firstly, people had no information why the institutions were set up at all, what the benefit would be, the pros and cons. There was no information as such at all.’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, LV)

‘We must know in which fields they intervene, their missions, who they are, what they do, what impact they have on our everyday life’ (Female, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in the last national elections, FR)

Information on the political parties and political groups within the EP

Participants mentioned a lack of information about what the parties groups are, their electoral programme and how these issues relate to matters at a European level.

‘They only debated national matters, fought over them, there was no electoral programme or so it seemed and they did nothing to enlighten the voters about the EU election.’ (Female, unspecified abstainer, PT)

What powers does the EP have? And can it act on important or mostly insignificant issues?

This also relates to the question above: ‘What does the EP do?’

Participants perceive media coverage of the work of the EP to be, amongst other things, negative and irregular and due to this have the impression that on some level the EP deals with matters that they regard as insignificant, such as the curvature or bananas and cucumbers, rather than aspects of real importance, such as the economy and employment.

Concrete examples of what has been achieved

‘What would be interesting is to see what they have already accomplished from this list of objectives.’ (Female, enthusiastic voter, BE)

‘I think you see Europe’s achievements when you travel. Using the same currency is great’ (Male, unspecified abstainer, FR)
**How are decisions made in the EP?**

This also relates to the question above: ‘**What does the EP do?**’

Decision-making at EP level was regarded by some participants as not very proactive. This also relates to the earlier point of whether **decisions are taken in a pro-active manner underscored by foresight** and about matters that are important.

’Sometimes you get this feeling that it’s a big boys’ playground – let’s make this law, oh we cannot, ok, then let’s rewrite the law, it’s no big deal. Greece has financial problems, ok, let’s take some money from here and give it to them.’ (Female, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in national election, EE)

’I don’t really understand where the decisions are made, it’s very scattered, between the ECB, the G20, the EU, I’m lost’ (Male, unspecified abstainer, FR)

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**How does the EP spend its money and why such lavish spending, e.g. on salaries?**

Especially in the context of rising **unemployment** as a result of the financial crises and as a result of how the EP is reported on in the media, participants questioned **EP expenditure**.

’I do not like the fact that there is such a huge difference between the salaries of MEPs and those of ordinary citizens of Europe’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, PL)

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**What do the MEPs do?**

*Information about the day-to-day work of the MEPs*

’I have no idea what the Bulgarian deputies are doing there. I have never heard some of them proposing something or explaining to the Bulgarian society what is going on in this Parliament’ (Female, unspecified abstainer, BG)

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**How they vote (process and content) and what their achievements have been**

See point directly above.

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**How are the MEPs being held to account, e.g. absenteeism**

’I saw a TV report from the European Parliament by an English reporter. It showed that MEPs only go in the morning to get their freebies and leave immediately afterwards.’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in national elections, CZ)

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**Do they have real decision-making power?**

’We have very few MEPs in the European Parliament and what is their weight there? What can they do there? Just to vote what the big countries are imposing?’ (Male, unspecified abstainer who voted in national elections, BG)
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<tr>
<th><strong>How does the EP relate to people’s lives?</strong></th>
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<td><strong>How does EP legislation relate to the legislation of specific countries?</strong></td>
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Participants were more easily able to articulate how legislative decisions made at EP level relate to country level than to their individual lives.

‘It is very important because legislation comes from there and it has to be implemented on a local level. If we do not comply then we pay penalties.’ (Female, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, CY)

‘It has always affected us but we don’t know which affairs in Finland have been influenced by the European politics.’ (Female, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, FI)

‘We’ve been asked to vote since I was young, but apart from the Festival of Europe, I don’t really see what the point of Europe is, and yet I belong to a generation who, at school in citizenship education, was always being told about Europe, but now I’m 30, I don’t always see the point of it all’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in the last national elections, FR)

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<tr>
<th><strong>What influence does their country have in the EP? Give MEPs, especially in smaller countries, more responsibility or representation.</strong></th>
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The majority of participants reported that instead of unity they felt there was inequality, with more powerful countries making decisions on behalf of the whole EU. They viewed the EU as more unstable and insecure as a result of the crisis.

There was also an impression that the crisis was being handled at intergovernmental level (especially by France and Germany) between large countries rather than at an EU level.

‘The European Union is huge. It is controlled by countries which have great influence on the European economy, especially Germany and France’ (Male, impulsive abstainer, DK)

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<tr>
<th><strong>Does my vote count? Do individual votes matter?</strong></th>
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Some participants felt that it did not matter whether they voted or not as their vote would not make a difference to the final result, given the size of the EU and the perceived lack of representation of issues that are important to them.

‘My vote would have been submerged. I felt indifference towards voting, because my vote would not have an impact far away in the huge Parliament’ (Female, impulsive abstainer, DK)

‘It’s never really linked to my life, or it’s never really linked to my area, or I can’t see the links, and maybe those points should be made clearer so that you feel like you should actually go out and vote because it might make a difference. At the moment I don’t feel it would make a difference if I did’ (Female, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, UK)

‘What can our six delegates do there against, I don’t know, 20 or 80 German delegates?’ (Male, impulsive abstainer voted in national elections, EE)
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<th>MODERATE TO HIGH IMPACT INFORMATION</th>
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### The election of candidates

_Voters should have the option to choose who they want and not be as restricted in choice as they currently are_

Participants were of the view that their choices should not be circumscribed by a system of predetermined lists. They wished to be able to make their own choices.

**Candidates should be highly qualified in order to represent their countries at a European level and not be associated with scandals or bad performance records**

‘The ones they sent were the ones that had got themselves into trouble in Lithuania.’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in national elections, LT)

**Better information about what candidates do**

This relates to a lack of knowledge about what the MEPs do and what the work of the EP involves.

**How do their planned activities differ from their predecessors in the EP?**

Participants were of the view that they had very little knowledge of the issues at stake in the EP elections, what the different candidates stood for, and how these issues related to their lives. This lack of knowledge, coupled with perceived insufficient campaigning before elections, resulted in participants not knowing whether and how candidates’ electoral programmes differed from those of their predecessors.

**New and interesting candidates**

Some participants were of the view that the proposed candidates would not adequately represent their interests at European level and were people who had ‘failed’ at national level. Therefore, some participants suggested that new candidates should come to the fore.

**Raise the profile of the elections**

_Create ‘hype’ around it_

Participants felt that European issues were often overlooked if national elections were held around the same time. In addition, participants felt that not enough information was provided about the elections and that they did not have sufficient awareness of what issues were being contested at a European level.

‘There was a lack of promotion in the media, in my opinion. We didn’t know all there was to know about them [the elections].’ (Male, unspecified abstainer, RO)
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<th>MODERATE TO HIGH IMPACT INFORMATION</th>
<th>Popularise the election campaign and information about the EP</th>
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<td>See point directly above.</td>
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<td>‘I came across this European Parliament election only a few days beforehand. It was too short notice for me!’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who did not vote in national elections, AT)</td>
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<td><strong>Clarity on the election programmes</strong></td>
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<td>What are the truly European issues that are at stake in the campaign?</td>
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<td>‘They only debated national matters, fought over them, there was no electoral programme or so it seemed and they did nothing to enlighten the voters about the EU election.’ (Female, unspecified abstainer, PT)</td>
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<td>What is it that the candidates stand for and intended to achieve, especially at a European level?</td>
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<td>‘It is important to know who stands for what, for what actions we vote.’ (Female, willing voter, BE)</td>
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<td>‘There was no clear political programme in the European Parliament election, only some superficial slogans.’ (Male, impulsive abstainer who voted in national elections, CZ)</td>
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