

2004 EU newcomers and then?

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My first article for maltastar.com asked one simple question: How difficult or otherwise would it be for a government to maintain its power after having lobbied for its country's EU membership? A simple question to ask : much more difficult to answer. However, after patiently carrying out the necessary research an overview became statistically clear, that in the case of pre-2004 accession countries (excluding the founding members), it became clear that while in three cases government was maintained and 'yes' party's votes increased, in another three cases the 'yes' party lost government, whilst in the seventh case government was maintained through alliance.

This second article's purpose is to discuss the same issue, focusing however on the countries which have basically joined the EU *with us*. Out of the new 2004 members, in **Lithuania**, the Labour Party rose to government in election the same year gaining 28.6% of valid votes and 39 seats. EU accession was led by a coalition between the Social Democratic Party and the New Union Social Liberals known as the Social Democratic Coalition. In the 2000 election, the Brazauskas Coalition had gained 31.3% of votes, but in 2004 it gained a mere 20.7%.

In the **Slovenian case**, the Liberal Democratic Party enjoyed a majority of 36.3% in the 2000 elections. This percentage went down to 22.8% by 2004 causing loss of government with the DeSUS (Slovenian Democratic Party) elected to govern.

In **Poland** too, the Democratic Left Alliance, suffered a sheer drop in support. After having obtained an impressive 41% in 2001, it lost a 29.7% of votes and only retained an 11.3% of votes in the 2004 elections. PM Kaczynski (twin of President and his co-actor in the 1962 film "The two who stole the Moon") has definitely stolen the seats! The PiS (Law & Justice Party) added 17.5% votes in support to previous election and gained 27% of valid votes. The Citizen's Platform gained 24.1%, an addition of 11.4% of votes to what it had gained in the previous election four years earlier. This was another unexpected sweeping victory for these two new allies.

In **Slovakia**, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, which had obtained 19.5% of valid votes in the 2002 National Council Elections got only 8.79% of the votes in the 2006 election. The **Czech Republic** government also suffered still-born birth to a dream come true after being the government to accompany its country to EU membership.

The **Hungarian** Socialist Party obtained the greatest number of seats in the 2006 elections and got into the government seats on the country. The previous government, which had led Hungary through EU membership, an alliance between the Hungarian Civic Union and the Hungarian Democratic Forum which enjoyed 188 seats in the 2002 ended up third place with regards to seat occupancy. And finally, in **Latvia**, the New Era Party which had won government in 2002 with 26 seats and 23.9% of votes, gave way to the People's Party in 2006 losing six seats in parliament.

The seven countries joining in 2004 that have held general elections since EU membership, and that may be closer to our case, have all changed the party in government. This seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Although, in the aforementioned countries, circumstances may differ from ours, mainly due to the heavy reliance on alliances in foreign parliamentary systems, after the next election will we find ourselves to have followed the rule, or will we be the exception?

POST-EU ACCESSION GOVERNMENTS

Country	Year of Accession	Party in government at the time of accession	First election after accession	New government
UK	1973	Conservative	1974	Labour
Ireland	1973	/	/	/
Denmark	1973	Liberal Party	1975	Social Democrats & Liberals
Greece	1981	New Democracy	1981	Socialist
Spain	1986	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party & Catalan Social Party	1986	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party & Catalan Social Party
Portugal	1986	Social Democratic Party since 1985 by 29.9% majority of votes	1987 by 50.2% majority of votes	Social Democratic Party
Austria	1995	SPO (Socialist Party of Austria) since 1994 with 34.9% majority of votes	1995	SPO (Socialist Party of Austria) with 38.1% majority of votes
Finland	1995	Agrarian-Conservative Party	1995	Social Democratic Party of Finland
Lithuania	2004	A Brazauskas Social Democratic Coalition since 2000	2004	Social Democratic Party of Lithuania

Czech Republic	2004	Social Democracy Since 2002	2006	Civic Democracy
Poland	2004	Democratic Left Alliance since 2001	2005	Law & Justice / Citizens' Platform
Slovakia	2004	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	2006	Social Democracy
Slovenia	2004	Liberal Democracy of Slovenia	2004	Slovenian Democratic Party
Hungary	2004	Hungarian Civic Union & Hungarian Democratic Forum	2006	Hungarian Socialist Party
Latvia	2004	New Era Party	2006	People's Party
Cyprus, Estonia, Malta			No post-EU membership election yet	