

## EU and then?

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As everything indicates an intensive electoral campaign is ripe leading to the 2007/2008 general election. Soon the country will be plunging into a political euphoria few other countries ever experience.

The Maltese next general election will be the first following EU membership. Although not the only factor to determine the outcome, EU membership and a shared sovereignty with Brussels, will definitely be one of the determining factors making voters happy or unhappy with the present government's performance. Keeping in mind that the Maltese political "duopoly" in parliament is different from that of all other governments, a look at how governments who led negotiations towards EU membership fared after actual membership, could give us a clue as to the trend when it comes to voters' judgement in a post-EU membership general election.

As a general opinion, however, a sharp distinction seems to lie between countries which acceded the EC/EU before the 2004 and those who acceded the EU in 2004. Whilst for the pre-2004 accession countries EC / EU membership seemed a very positive step forward, in 2004 the trend changes dramatically.

The accompanying table gives a very brief summary of the parties / governments that led their country to EU membership.

### Case-studies of past pre-2004 accessions

The Conservatives in the **UK** lost 33 seats in the 1974 election (ie the first following official membership). At the same election Labour gained thirteen more seats than the previous election and of course, government. In **Denmark** the historical so-called "landslide election" took place after EU membership with half of parliamentarians being replaced by new ones although the Liberals partly held on to the leading seats. In **Greece**, which acceded the EU in 1981, the New Democracy lost government in the same year to the first Socialist government in Greek history.

However, in the case of the **Spanish** Socialist Workers' Party and the Catalan Socialist Party (in alliance) majority of parliamentary seats was maintained. In **Portugal**, the Social Democratic Party which stood in government since 1985 by a 29.9% majority of votes (a centre right party), in the 1989 elections (accession taking place in 1986) strengthened its majority to 50.2% of votes. The S.P.O. (Socialist Party of **Austria**) was in government since 1994 with a 34.9% majority. Accession took place in 1995. In the 1995 election the majority of the same party was 38.1% of votes.

It is clear therefore, that with regards to accessions taking place before 2004 "half" of the governments lobbying for their country's membership were re-elected in the first election following actual membership (including Denmark as one of them although this might not be the case), whilst the other "half" were bluntly let down by the electorate.

As already said above, the scenario and identity of the EU itself changing as time went by, however, this does not seem to be case with countries which joined in 2004 when EU membership became a "free-for-all" affair and door went wide open for both Polish great dane and Maltese chihuahua. As will be seen in my next article EU-membership might well have been the break-all rather than the be-all

for Malta's 'yes' campaigners fellow-lobbyists. In the EU era EU-membership turns out to be rather a bitter bad political omen for the party which has worked most in favour of EU membership.

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