



EuroPCom session report

The European elections campaigns: What worked, what did not?

Thursday, 7 November, 14h30 – 16h00

Speakers: **Steve Clark**, Director for liaison offices, DG Communication, European Parliament; **Jens Mester**, Head of unit, Inter-institutional Relations, Corporate Contracts & Europe Direct Contact Centre, DG for Communication, European Commission; **Dr Franziska Marquart**, Postdoctoral researcher at University of Amsterdam

Moderator: **Michele Cercone**, Head of the events unit, European Committee of the Regions

The European election campaigns had already been on the EuroPCom programme in 2018. The workshop mainly focused on how to prepare a good campaign to increase voter turnout in the 2019 European Parliament elections. This time, the seminar was more analytical and aimed to find out what the effects of the campaign were and interpret results in terms of voter turnout across the different Member States.

Michele Cercone opened the workshop stating that for communicators, this evaluation was crucial to improving upcoming election campaigns. He then introduced the speakers who spoke about their experiences and efforts to increase the voter turnout in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

Steve Clark began by stating that the election campaigns of 2014 and 2019 were very different, mainly because the 2014 campaign was approached from a strategic communications point of view, while the 2019 campaign was more focused on voter mobilisation strategies. The most important lesson that **Mr Clark** and his team learnt was that it is very important to spend more money, time and effort on distribution and less on production. Another key aspect of this 2019 campaign was the magnitude of the social networks, which reached more people, especially the young target group.

Mr Clark indicated that there were outstanding developments in terms of the organisation of the campaign due to the importance that was given to the internalisation of the process. A more focused approach was taken to external consultancies, which were used for specific issues. It is essential to continue working with partners, volunteers and supporters for future campaigns and to stay focused on young Europeans.

Another crucial dimension during the election campaign was getting to people's emotions in order to attract them and convince them to vote. **Mr Clark** described the emotional aspect as essential since it is what moves people to act. The most effective way to reach out is to link the election campaign with specific topics that really matter to citizens. One of the most important outcomes of the 2019 elections was the high voter turnout amongst 16 to 24 year olds (the ages depend on the country referred to), as in some countries it doubled or even tripled compared to the 2014 elections.

Jens Mester started by declaring the importance of reaching professionals and organisations outside of the European bubble that work in areas linked to voter mobilisation and have an interest in the analysis of European elections. Since 2014, communicators have known that efforts had to be made to mobilise European citizens and to ensure they have greater trust in the European institutions.

To reach this goal, the European Commission worked on different initiatives such as the citizens' dialogue. Furthermore, their approach to communication was developed through close cooperation with the European Parliament. They worked together to prepare the electoral campaign for the 2019 elections. It was important to create synergies as it became relevant to communicate to citizens that the future of the European Parliament was not the only element at stake but rather the future of the entire EU, making communication a joint responsibility for all institutions. The term "EP elections" was therefore replaced by "European elections".

The European Commission's three levels of action for electoral campaigns are:

- to provide information on what the EU and the European institutions do for the citizen, as the more voters know about the benefits of the EU, the more inclined they are to vote;
- to explain to citizens how and where to vote;
- to engage the audience with online consultations about the future of Europe, e.g. in information centres.

Franziska Marquart introduced the EU opinions study in which more than 12 000 people from ten EU countries were interviewed (Denmark, Spain, Germany, Greece, Sweden, France, Hungary, Poland, Netherlands and Czech Republic). The aim was to understand the significant differences in voter turnout per country.

The conclusions show that in some Member States people can go to vote on the weekends, which encourages them to go, and that in some countries voting is mandatory while in others it is not. 43% of citizens indicated that they would vote if they had more information about what the EU does for them.

Information is not only what is shown on social media but refers to the way in which the message is conveyed as well. Ms Marquart showed some of the positive and negative effects of campaign engagement on electoral participation. Positive effects included talking with friends and family about European politics, seeing political posters, actively searching for information online, reading party material and trying to convince others to go and vote. Negative influences on peoples' participation in the elections included receiving information from traditional media, holding political discussions online and seeing party advertising on social media.