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National Campaigns for a European Choice

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Abstract

“National Campaigns for a European Choice” by Annakaisa Suni. Independent work (15 credits) in Political Science, Advanced Course, Spring 2010. Supervisor: Sten Berglund.

The aim of this study is to describe and compare the European Parliament’s communication campaigns in Finland and Sweden before the 2009 European elections. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How were the campaigns planned and implemented?
2. How did the campaigns adapt to the media’s needs?
3. How did structural, environmental and resource factors influence the campaigns?

This is a comparative study with two cases, which were chosen using a most similar –design. The material consists of qualitative interviews at European Parliament Information Offices in Helsinki and Stockholm and of campaign documents produced by the European Parliament.

The campaigns in Finland and Sweden were both part of a Pan-European institutional campaign. They were both characterised by a high level of professionalisation and also a high level of media adaptation when it comes to timing and format, but not when it comes to content. On national level, there were some important differences. In Sweden, the campaign was more clearly oriented towards distinctive target groups and used less face-to-face-campaigning towards the large audience. The political climate in Sweden matched the institutional campaign better than in Finland; the discussion was issue-oriented whereas in Finland the focus was on individual candidates and on ”what’s best for Finland”.

Keywords: Political communication, election campaigns, European Parliament

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1. Introduction

1.1 The research problem and aim of the study

Although elections are the foundation of modern representative democracy, an increasing number of people choose not to use their right to vote. Also, some elections seem to matter more than others. European elections, where members of the European Parliament are chosen, have often been referred to as second order elections. Participation is considerably lower than in national elections in the EU area. This has been explained by less being at stake in European elections. Other possible explanations are low knowledge of and negative attitudes towards the European Union.

To increase knowledge and also to increase election participation, the European Parliament organised a communication campaign before the European elections in June 2009. Election and voter mobilisation campaigns are not new phenomena but usually they are led by political parties and candidates to persuade people to vote in a specific way. The European Parliament's campaign was, naturally, non-partisan and it was planned and led by bureaucrats. In the Nordic context these kind of institutional campaigns are rare; it would be difficult to imagine e.g. the Swedish Parliament organising a campaign to inform citizens of its mere existence and its importance.

Another interesting factor about the campaign is that it was planned centrally and implemented in all EU member countries. In this study I have chosen to concentrate on two quite similar member countries, Finland and Sweden, and look at the campaign in their context. In Finland the election participation was 40,3 percent, a small decrease by 0,8 percentage points compared to the elections in 2004¹. In Sweden the 2009 elections were comparatively a success. 45,5 percent voted, an increase of 7,6 percentage points that also broke the negative trend and was Sweden's highest turnout ever in European elections². The Eurobarometer study from autumn 2009 also

¹ Statistics Finland – European Parliament elections 2009, confirmed result, [www.tilastokeskus.fi, http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/euvaa/2009/euvaa_2009_2009-06-12_tie_001_en.html](http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/euvaa/2009/euvaa_2009_2009-06-12_tie_001_en.html) (2010-05-22).

² Kraftig ökning av valdeltagandet bland unga män, [www.scb.se, http://www.scb.se/PressRelease_283148.aspx](http://www.scb.se/PressRelease_283148.aspx) (2010-05-22).

shows that more people remembered reading or hearing about the communication campaign in Sweden (86 percent) than in Finland (71 percent)³.

The aim of this study is to describe and compare the European Parliament's voter mobilisation campaigns in Finland and Sweden. The goal is not to explain the differences in participation but instead to increase knowledge of institutional non-partisan election campaigns through a comparative study.

1.2 Background

To present my study as a part of a bigger context, I will start by shortly describing the European Union and the European Parliament's changing role in the Union. Then I will describe studies on electoral participation and especially the impact of election campaigns on participation. Further, I will introduce the political and electoral systems in Finland and Sweden. Finally I present studies on political communication in those two countries.

1.2.1 The European Union and the European Parliament

The first steps towards the European Union were taken in 1950, when Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands formed the European Coal and Steel Community⁴. The goal was to unite Europe economically and politically in order to end the wars between neighbours and to secure a lasting peace. Since then European integration has both deepened and widened. As a result of a gradual enlargement process the EU today has 27 member countries. Cooperation has been deepened through a number of treaties, the most important being the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community, the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty), the Treaty of Nice and finally the Treaty of Lisbon that entered into force on 1 December 2009.⁵

The European integration project was from beginning promoted and controlled by the political elite. To avoid conflict with the supporters of state sovereignty the process developed slowly and "partly by the back door"⁶. The people were not included in the development from the beginning.

³ *Eurobarometre special 320*, June 2009, p. 67.

⁴ *The history of the European Union*, [www.europa.eu, http://europa.eu/abc/history/index_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/history/index_en.htm) (2010-03-23).

⁵ *Treaties and law*, [www.europa.eu, http://europa.eu/abc/treaties/index_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/treaties/index_en.htm) (2010-03-23).

⁶ Blondel, Jean; Sinnott, Richard & Svensson, Palle, 1998, *People and Parliament in the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 3.

It is against this background that we should see the “democratic deficit” theory often associated with the European elections, i.e. the claim that a vote cast in the European elections lacks influence, which leads to a lack of legitimacy.⁷

Although it is not the only democratic element in the EU, the European Parliament has been regarded as the institution that could reduce the democratic deficit and increase the EU’s legitimacy. With each new treaty, the Parliament has acquired more democratic, supervisory and legislative powers. With the Treaty of Brussels in 1975 it acquired the right to scrutinise EU accounts. The Single European Act signed in 1986 ensured that the Parliament's assent is obligatory before a new country can join the EU. The Amsterdam Treaty signed in 1997 gave the Parliament a much stronger position in co-legislating with the Council on many areas and also gave it the power to accept or refuse the assembly of the Commission. Finally, the Treaty of Lisbon has made the European Parliament more powerful than ever before. The parliament now decides on the vast majority of EU legislation together with the Council of Ministers and it has the last say on EU budget.⁸ It is important to note, though, that during the 2009 European elections campaign the Treaty of Lisbon had not yet entered into force.

1.2.2 Participation in the European elections

Despite its increasing powers, the European Parliament has not been able to draw the citizens of Europe to the ballot boxes. Since 1979 the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been elected directly by citizens in the member countries. The turnout in the 1979 elections was 62 percent and has been decreasing ever since: in 1999 it was 50 percent and in the most recent European elections in June 2009 only 43 percent.⁹ Further, the turnout in European elections is lower than in national elections in most member states.¹⁰ So why do many Europeans abstain from voting in European elections but vote in national elections?

Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson have studied turnout and reasons behind abstention in the 1994 European elections. Earlier studies had suggested that low turnout is a consequence of the second

⁷ Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson 1998, p. 3 ff.

⁸ *Treaties and the European Parliament*, www.europarl.europa.eu, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?language=EN&id=77> (2010-03-23).

⁹ *Turnout at the European elections (1979-2009)*, www.europarl.europa.eu, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/turnout_en.html (2010-03-23).

¹⁰ Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson 1998, p. 32.

order character of the European elections. The turnout would in that case be affected by estimates of the limited power of the Parliament in comparison to the national parliaments, and calculations that there is less at stake than in national elections. Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson's study does not support this theory. Instead, they see participation as influenced by general attitudes to the European Union, attitudes to European integration, degree of involvement in the integration process, knowledge of the European Union and exposure to the election campaign.¹¹

Of great interest for this essay is the finding that exposure to the election campaign (here meaning the campaign efforts by parties and candidates) increases turnout. The authors divide the respondents into four groups: "none" (those who were not exposed to the campaign), "passive" (the exposure was limited to being contacted by parties, receiving leaflets, or seeing or listening to advertising or radio or television coverage), "partially active" (those who took part in the campaign through one of the following channels: reading about it in the newspaper or discussing it with family and friends) and "fully active" (those who took part in the campaign using both the active ways). The results show that passive exposure to the campaign had little or no effect at all, whereas active exposure can be linked to positive attitudes and knowledge of the EU and the European Parliament. Active exposure also increased election turnout.¹²

It is important to bear in mind that it is impossible to determine the causality of this relation. It is possible that the people were actively exposed to the campaign because they already were interested and had good knowledge of the EU. Most reasonable is to expect that the relation works in both ways. When the authors controlled for one more variable, political interest, they found that the campaign exposure made no difference in participation for those who already had a high level of political interest. Participation among those with low political interest, on the other hand, was 49 percent for those who were not exposed to the campaign and 72 percent for those who were actively exposed. In other words, the election campaign has the potential to increase turnout among those with low political interest.¹³

¹¹ Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson 1998, p. 237 ff.

¹² Ibid, p. 143 ff.

¹³ Ibid.

1.2.3 The political systems in Finland and Sweden

It is reasonable to expect participation in European elections to be influenced by the political system and political culture in each member state. The political systems in Finland and Sweden have many similarities; both can be seen as representatives of a “Nordic model”¹⁴. Both countries have parliamentary systems with proportional elections (even though Finland used to have a strong president until 2000 when the president’s powers were strongly limited). There are resemblances in the party systems: besides a multi-party system based on a left-right scale, a Green party and also populist and EU-critical parties have emerged.

Finland has a tradition of coalition governments whereas in Sweden the most common form has been either minority or majority government by the dominant Social Democratic party. The situation in Sweden could be changing, though. At the moment four right-wing parties govern together and also the left-wing parties have formed an alliance for the next elections to be held in autumn 2010. The same tendencies can not be seen in Finland, where two of the three biggest parties usually form a government – any pair of them is a possible government option. This has a moderating influence on political confrontations in Finland.¹⁵

A main difference when it comes to elections is that in Finland the voter has to choose a candidate whereas in Sweden most people vote for a party list. In Finland, the ranking order of the candidates is decided directly by the number of votes given to the candidate.¹⁶ The emphasis is on individual candidates and campaigns and on candidates well-known from other areas than politics, such as sportsmen/women.

Even though Sweden in 1995 introduced the possibility to vote for a candidate as well as for a party, there have not been many cases in national elections where the personal votes have made a difference. In the European elections, on the other hand, the personal votes matter more. Since the whole country forms a voting district (the same goes for European elections in Finland) more candidates have the possibility to gain attention and be recognised and consequently more people

¹⁴ Moring, Tom, 2008, “Media and Politics in Finland”. Strömbäck, Jesper; Ørsten, Mark & Aalberg, Toril, (eds.) 2008, *Communicating Politics – Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, Göteborg, Nordicom, p. 45.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 47.

use the possibility to name a candidate as well as a party. Also the limit for personal votes needed in order to advance a candidate on the list is five percent instead of the eight percent needed in national elections. When we add the fact that a much smaller number of representatives are elected to the European Parliament than to the national parliament, it can be said that the European elections in Sweden, too, have fairly strong elements of personal elections.

Finland and Sweden became members of the European Union together with Austria in 1995. Finland is also a member of the monetary union and introduced the euro in 2002 whereas Sweden so far has kept outside the monetary union as a result of a negative referendum. Earlier studies have shown that Finns are both better informed¹⁷ and more positive¹⁸ towards the EU than Swedes. That situation seems to be changing. According to the last Eurobarometer survey made in autumn 2009, Swedes are in fact more positive (57 percent) to Swedish membership than Finns to Finnish membership (51 percent). In Finland there are somewhat more people who think that Finland has benefited from the membership (60 percent) than in Sweden (55 percent). All in all, the attitudes in both countries are close to the European average and also close to each other.¹⁹

1.2.4 Political communication in Finland and Sweden

When it comes to political communication systems, both Finland and Sweden represent a “Democratic corporatist model”, characterised by three coexisting factors. Firstly, a high degree of political parallelism, i.e. the extent to which the media system is rooted in political divisions, has coexisted with a strongly developed mass-circulation press; secondly, a high degree of political parallelism with a high level of journalistic professionalism and thirdly, involvement from state in the media sector with strong protection for press freedom.²⁰

¹⁷ Oscarsson, Henrik & Holmberg, Sören, 2006, *Europaval*. Svenska Valforskningsprogrammet, Göteborg, p. 141.

¹⁸ Andersson, Tom, 2008, “Conflicting Representations in the European Parliamentary Elections”. Strömbäck, Jesper; Ørsten, Mark & Aalberg, Toril, (eds.) 2008, *Communicating Politics – Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, Göteborg, Nordicom, p. 128.

¹⁹ *Eurobarometre special 320*, June 2009.

²⁰ Strömbäck, Jesper; Ørsten, Mark & Aalberg, Toril, 2008, “Political Communication in the Nordic Countries. An Introduction”. Strömbäck, Jesper; Ørsten, Mark & Aalberg, Toril, (eds.) 2008, *Communicating Politics – Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, Göteborg, Nordicom, p. 19 f.

But there are also differences. In Finland, paid-for political advertising has been allowed on commercial channels since 1991. The biggest commercial TV station MTV3 has voluntarily set the only content limits applied: personal attacks or mixed product/political ads are not allowed²¹. In Sweden political advertisement is forbidden on all channels broadcasting from Sweden. However, when the commercial channel TV4 started sending digitally, some parties took the chance and introduced political advertisement in the 2009 European elections²². Despite that, political TV advertising is more established and more important in Finland compared to Sweden.

1.3 Theory

1.3.1 Medialisation

The concept medialisation is often mentioned in connection to election campaigns. It is one of many terms used for basically the same phenomenon; also known as mediatisation, Americanisation and mediocracy. I will here use the term medialisation since it was originally used in some conceptualising Scandinavian studies and has remained the most frequently used term in Scandinavia.²³

The medialisation hypothesis is based on the idea that there is a surplus of information and a deficit of attention in society, which leads to a competition for attention. As media have become the most important information channel, editors and journalists have gained an important position as gatekeepers, deciding which issues gain the attention of the large audiences.²⁴ Four phases can be identified in the medialisation process:

1. Mass media constitute the most important communication channel between political actors and citizens.

²¹ Moring 2008, p. 57.

²² “Vi ska nu börja med politisk reklam på TV”, www.dn.se, <http://www.dn.se/debatt/vi-ska-nu-borja-med-politisk-reklam-i-teve-1.846861> (2010-05-22).

²³ Moring, Tom, 2006, “Between Medialisation and Tradition: Campaigning in Finland in a Longitudinal Perspective”. Maier, Michaela & Tenscher, Jens, (eds.) 2006, *Campaigning in Europe – Campaigning for Europe*, Berlin, Lit verlag, p. 81.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 82.

2. Mass media have become semi-independent from government or other political bodies and control their own content. The media follow their own “media logic”, i.e. their evaluation of newsworthiness and their structural working methods.
3. Mass media have become so important that political actors start to adapt to the notion of newsworthiness and media logic.
4. The political actors internalise these values, which become a built-in part of the governing process.²⁵

Increased autonomy of the media and increased volatility among voters are two reasons behind the medialisation process. Increased volatility leaves more room for “media effects” and also makes election campaigns more important because more voters make up their minds closer to the elections.²⁶ Moreover, the political and institutional actors that lead election campaigns must negotiate with and adapt to the media’s preferred timing, format and even content²⁷. To do this, their communication efforts need to become more professionalised, just as journalism has become more professionalised as a part of step two in the medialisation process.

According to Jesper Strömbäck & Lars W. Nord, Sweden has reached at least the third phase of medialisation and politics has to a high degree become medialized. The news media are more important with reference to political communication processes than in many other countries. The primary causes are the independence of the news media from politics, media being the most important information source in general, the parties’ lack of possibilities to communicate directly, through advertising, on television (here the situation is changing though), people’s increasing need for orientation and finally the wide-spread belief among political actors that they need to adapt to media standards.²⁸

There are reasons to expect that political communication and election campaigns in Finland would have become medialized, according to Tom Moring. One of the main reasons is that the

²⁵ Strömbäck, Jesper & Nord, Lars W., 2008, “Media and Politics in Sweden”. Strömbäck, Jesper; Ørsten, Mark & Aalberg, Toril, (eds.) 2008, *Communicating Politics – Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, Göteborg, Nordicom, p. 103 ff.

²⁶ Moring 2006, p. 81.

²⁷ Mazzoleni, Gianpietro & Schulz, Winfried, 1999, “‘Mediatization’ of politics: A challenge for democracy?”. *Political Communication*, July-September 1999, Vol. 16, Issue 3, p. 249.

²⁸ Strömbäck & Nord 2008, p. 103 ff.

media sphere in Finland is less regulated than e.g. in Sweden. However that is countered by a number of factors. Electoral volatility is low, leaving less room for “media effects”. The media system has remained rather traditional with regional newspapers maintaining their grip of the readers. Finally, the consensual tradition of the Finnish party system goes against the medialisation tendencies. In fact, even though Moring sees some tendencies towards medialisation, the process seems not to have gone as far as in Sweden.²⁹

1.3.2 Electoral force fields

All the political campaigns, partisan or non-partisan, aim to inform, persuade and mobilise their audience. How they do that is influenced by three sets of factors: structural, environmental and resource variables. *The structural factors* include the political system (presidential or parliamentary), the voting system (first-past-the-post or proportional), the political culture and tradition, the regulatory context (legal regulations to political advertising) and the media ecology (partisan or non-partisan press, commercial or public service television, wide-spread internet access). *The environmental factors* are the processes and issues that form the political climate at a given time. *The resource variables* refer to both the financial and the symbolic resources of the campaign organisation. Each campaign is formed in the interplay of the structural, environmental and resource variables.³⁰

1.4 Research questions

As noted earlier, studies show that active exposure to election campaigns does increase turnout. Getting the campaign message through to as many people as possible becomes the main challenge in today’s surplus of information. In Sweden, 86 percent of voters were exposed to the European Parliament’s voter mobilisation campaign compared to 71 percent in Finland. The main research question is how did the campaigns in Finland and Sweden differ from each other?

According to the medialisation theory, the mass media constitute the most important communication channel between citizens and political actors. To catch the media’s attention the political actors need, to a greater extent than before, adapt to the media logic and notions of newsworthiness. To do this, they need to become professionalised in operating the campaign.

²⁹ Moring 2008, p. 56 ff.

³⁰ Sanders, Karen, 2009, *Communicating Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 166 f.

Other factors that affect the success of an election campaign are the electoral force fields. To compare the campaigns, I will ask three questions, where questions number one and two connect to the medialisation and professionalisation theory and question number three to the electoral force fields theory.

1. How were the campaigns planned and implemented?
2. How did the campaigns adapt to the media's needs?
3. How did the structural, environmental and resource factors influence the campaigns?

1.5 Method and material

1.5.1 Design

This is a comparative study with two cases, the European Parliament's communication campaigns 2009 in Finland and Sweden. Both campaigns were part of the European Parliament's central campaign performed in all the member states, but there were national differences in implementation. I have used a similar-design; the countries were chosen because they resemble each other when it comes to political and media systems, EU membership and attitudes towards EU. The number of variables has in that way been minimized. Still, this essay can not and does not attempt to show any causal connections, nor can its results be generalized. Its value lies in shedding light on institutional election campaigns in a context of medialisation.

The planning of the campaign began in 2007 and that is also the starting point for this essay. However, I have concentrated on the period January – July 2009, when the campaign was officially launched and implemented. It culminated in April – May 2009. Moreover, I have only studied the campaign from the European Parliament's perspective. When environmental factors, such as the political election campaign and the political climate are referred to, they represent the understanding of the EU officials interviewed.

The study consists of qualitative interviews with EU officials at the European Parliament Information Offices (later referred to as EPIOs) in Helsinki and Stockholm. The EPIOs were responsible for the planning and implementation of the campaigns nationally. To back up interview data I used documents on planning and evaluation of the campaign by the Directorate

General for Communication (later referred to as DG COMM) and EPIOs Helsinki and Stockholm. The research questions were operationalized in the following way:

1. How were the campaigns planned and implemented?

This question refers to the level of professionalisation of the communication campaign. It includes the planning of the campaign, the goals of the campaign, the themes and arguments used, the organisation and work distribution, cooperation with campaign partners and the results of the campaign.

2. How did the campaigns adapt to the media's needs?

This question includes contact with journalists and adaptation to media logic, both when it comes to timing, format and content.

3. How did the structural, environmental and resource factors influence the campaigns?

This question aims to widen the understanding of the campaign and the processes that influenced it. It includes the structural context, financial and staff resources, the political campaign, the general debate and the political climate during the campaign.

1.5.2 Material

I have done six qualitative interviews, three at EPIO Helsinki and three at EPIO Stockholm. The permanent EU officials are divided into two categories, administrators (AD) and assistants (AST). In Helsinki the interviewed were Head of Information Office Pekka Nurminen (AD, responsible for the national campaign), Press Officer Minna Ollikainen (AD, responsible for media contacts) and assistant Jaana Immonen (AST, events for citizens). In Stockholm, the interviewed were Head of Information Office Björn Kjellström (AD, responsible for the national campaign), Press Officer Marina Lähteenmaa (AD, responsible for media contacts) and Markus Bonekamp, Deputy Head of the Office (AD, project manager). I originally wanted to interview an AST official in Stockholm as well, but because the two offices are slightly differently organised I could better cover the different parts of the campaign with this constellation of informants.

The interview questions were divided into five categories: planning and organisation, campaign issues, implementation of the campaign, feedback and results³¹. All the interviews were based on a basic scheme of themes but were varied depending on the informant's role in the campaign and his/her answers to previous questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the answers were analysed and compared to answer the research questions.

Besides the interviews, I have used following documents:

Documents produced by DG COMM:

- European elections 2009 – Institutional Communication Campaign (Brussels, January 2009)
- Overview of DG COMM activities for the 2009 European elections

Documents produced by advertising agency Scholz & Friends:

- 375 Million Votes for Europe – A communication concept by Scholz & Friends for the European Parliament elections in 2009 (Brussels, September 2008)

Documents produced by EPIO Helsinki:

- EE09 Campaign debriefing – Finland (Helsinki, July 2009)
- Eurooppavaalit-kampanja 2009 – Mitä tehtiin, mikä onnistui, mikä mätti. A presentation by head of EPIO Helsinki Pekka Nurminen at University of Jyväskylä, Department of Communication (January 2010)
- List of events organised in Finland

Documents produced by EPIO Stockholm:

- EE09 Campaign debriefing – Sweden (Stockholm, July 2009)
- List of events organised in Sweden

I also used the European post-elections survey 2009 (Eurobarometre special 320, June 2009).

1.6 Structure

The analysis part of this study is divided into five chapters. In chapter two I present the European Parliament's common communication strategy, its aims, themes and the tools that were used, and describe how the campaign was adapted in Finland and Sweden. In the following chapter I

³¹ For interview questions, please see Appendix 2.

compare the independent, national campaign efforts in the two countries. Chapter four concentrates on comparing media relations and adaptation to the media's needs. Structural and environmental factors that affected the campaign in Sweden and Finland are discussed in chapter five. Chapter six emphasises the campaign's special character as a non-partisan, institutional campaign. The results of this study are presented as answers to the research questions in chapter seven.

2. European Elections 2009 – an institutional communication campaign

It's your choice. That was the core message of the European Parliament's communication strategy for the 2009 European elections, launched on 17 March 2009 and translated into 34 different languages. Since the first European elections in 1979, the turnout had consistently decreased while the cost of advertising per voter had increased. The 2009 campaign took a whole new approach compared to earlier institutional campaigns, which had been concentrated on civic duty. Instead of telling the citizens that it is their duty to vote, the campaign argued that EU decisions have an impact on citizens' daily life and that it is in everyone's interest to vote.³²

2009 was also the first time there was a common institutional campaign in all 27 member states. In 2004 there had been 25 different national campaigns with different visual profiles; in 2009 the same stylised EU star logo was used in every member country³³. The eight major tools, including billboards, TV and radio adverts and communication support material, were developed by the DG COMM in Brussels in cooperation with Scholz & Friends advertising agency and implemented with the support of the EPIOs in member countries. More tools and activities, most importantly media relations, were planned and implemented by the EPIOs.

2.1 Planning

Planning of the campaign started in spring 2007, "not one moment too early" according to the head of Helsinki office³⁴. In the first phase a small working group consisting of officials at the DG COMM produced a strategy paper including the campaign's goals and a schedule for planning and implementation of the campaign. After the strategy had been adopted by the Parliament the actual planning phase began, including an open call for tenders for the selection

³² *Overview of DG COMM activities for the 2009 European Elections*, p. 5 ff.

³³ For an example of the campaign material, please see Appendix 1.

³⁴ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

of a communications agency. The winner of the call for tenders, advertising agency Scholz & Friends started its work in autumn 2008. The experience seems to be that the schedule was too tight but major misses or delays were avoided.

Officials from the EPIOs took part in the planning process. In both Helsinki and Stockholm the officials say that they contributed to the planning but did not have key influence on it. It seems though that the officials in Helsinki felt party to a greater extent; this might be because the head of the office was one of the members of the original working group in 2007.³⁵

2.2 The goals of the campaign

There was an extensive discussion at the DG COMM about the official goal of the campaign³⁶. Should the goal be to stop the trend of decreasing turnout figures, even increase turnout, or more modestly to increase citizens' awareness of the EU and the European Parliament? The latter goal was chosen, partly out of carefulness, but mostly because the DG COMM was aware that the communication campaign only has a supporting role in citizens' choice to vote. It seems though that behind the scenes the real, if not official, goal was to increase turnout³⁷.

The mere organising of the Pan-European campaign was another "behind the scenes" aim. As the head of the Helsinki office puts it:

"The first goal kind of was to create a campaign that would be coherent, where different forms of communication would be integrated, that would have a clear message and preferably be effective and influential, too, in all the member states."³⁸

It was a challenge to plan a campaign that considered both the legal regulations (e.g. time limitations for campaigns before elections) and political sensitivities in the 27 member countries. One should also note that there were institutional aims in the background, i.e. to emphasise the Parliament's role and importance³⁹.

³⁵ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

³⁶ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

³⁷ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16); Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

³⁸ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

³⁹ Ibid.

Another important change in approach compared to earlier campaigns was that the 2009 campaign aimed to focus on building media attention. This approach was calculated to be more cost efficient than a massive investment in advertisement.⁴⁰

Among those who abstain from voting in the European elections, there are three groups that also became main target groups in the campaign: youth, less qualified workers and women. Of course, there is variation between member states. The campaign paid particular attention to likely voters, most accessible voters and first time voters.⁴¹

2.3 The campaign themes

As mentioned earlier, the core message of the campaign was about choice. The message was illustrated by a variety of different political themes, e.g. energy, migration and consumer protection. Three criteria were used when choosing the themes: they should be relevant to citizens, the EP should have actual power over the issues, and there should be different opinions and conflicts between the political alternatives. Out of a wide set of themes the member states chose a couple of themes that according to earlier understanding, especially Eurobarometer surveys, were nationally relevant. Both Finland and Sweden chose energy, consumer protection and borders. Finland also used a citizens' safety theme while Sweden used a climate change theme.⁴²

In both countries the campaign themes were used as examples. The aim was not to control or limit the general discussion but to illustrate the choice. The consumer protection billboard, showing two chickens packed in plastic, is one example of how the issues were used in advertising⁴³. The billboard showed one chicken with no text at all and the other with several overly clear warning stickers ("Cook before eating! Bones are not eatable!"). The text below asks "How much labelling do we need?" and encourages the reader to vote in the European elections. The TV commercials with slightly exaggerated "news reports of the future" are another example. One of the news clips shows a man with a baby behind a news reader's desk, saying "all fathers have to leave jobs and be with their children for two years..." The

⁴⁰ *Overview of DG COMM activities for the 2009 European Elections*, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Overview of DG COMM activities for the 2009 European Elections*, p. 5.

⁴² Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

⁴³ Please see Appendix 1.

advertisement ends with the text: “What will tomorrow’s news look like? You decide at the European elections 2009.”⁴⁴

Officials in both Finland and Sweden say that the “It’s your choice” message worked well and that one of the best parts of the campaign was precisely that it had the same message and profile in all EU, that it was a truly Pan-European campaign. Because the themes were chosen nationally from a wide selection, they applied well to the national context. In Sweden the general debate was more issue-oriented than in Finland, which I will discuss in more detail later. All in all, the campaign themes were only considered examples and that is why their relevance was not the critical part of the campaign in neither of the countries.

2.4 The campaign tools

For the first time there was a general logo for the European elections campaign in all member states, with a stylised star from the EU flag, the “It’s your choice” –claim, the baseline “European elections” and the election date⁴⁵. The common logo was highly appreciated by officials in Finland and Sweden. The logo was most successful in Sweden, where it was used in every news report covering the European elections in public service channel SVT and also widely used in other media.

Besides the visual image, the DG COMM together with Scholz & Friends produced a great part of the campaign tools. In member states the EPIOs cooperated with local Scholz & Friends offices. I will now describe the main tools that were common for all member states and their applicability to Finland and Sweden.

The press kit was a folder that provided journalists with information about the Parliament’s role, upcoming issues and the elections, statistics, visual material and help for searching for more information. In 2004 the press kit had been a total disaster because it did not become available until the week the elections were to be held. This time the press kit was ready in February 2009 and was widely used by Press Officers in both Finland and Sweden in their press contacts. The folder was one of the most successful tools and it was much appreciated by journalists.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *European elections 2009 – Institutional Communication Campaign*, January 2009, Brussels.

⁴⁵ *Overview of DG COMM activities for the 2009 European Elections*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *EE09 Campaign debriefing – Finland, 2009; EE09 Campaign debriefing – Sweden, 2009.*

Media seminars aimed to inform and educate journalists about the Parliament and **pro-active selling of the Elections** aimed to sell stories of the institutional campaign itself. I will return to the media relations later in the study.

TV spots were produced centrally but adapted to national language and format needs. They were aired during the last four weeks before the elections. The distribution of the advert was entirely free of charge in both Sweden and Finland. YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, ran the spot 54 times in Finnish and 14 times in Swedish and commercial MTV3 ran it 36 times. In Sweden, commercial TV4 aired the spot 36 times; Canal 7 aired it 152 times and Open Channel twice.⁴⁷

Radio adverts elaborated on the same theme as the TV spots: “tomorrow’s news”. They were produced nationally, paid-for and aired from late April to early June. In Finland some adverts were negotiated by the EPIO and some by the advertising agency; the adverts negotiated by the EPIO were considerably cheaper. In Finland the radio spots were one of the most successful tools according to EP officials.⁴⁸

Election website (produced centrally in 22 languages) worked well and was widely used by journalists.

Social media was a new part of the campaign. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter were some of the platforms used for the central campaign. In Finland there were no national social media efforts whereas in Sweden social media were used as a part of a cooperation project targeting young voters. The opinion in both countries is that work with social media could have been improved; e.g. in Finland the Twitter account only attracted around one hundred followers. Press Officers in both countries agreed that social media will play a bigger role in future information work.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *EE09 Campaign debriefing – Finland, 2009; EE09 Campaign debriefing – Sweden, 2009.*

⁴⁸ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Jaana Immonen (2010-03-30).

⁴⁹ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

The outdoor campaign with billboards and 3D installations continued on the choice theme and was appreciated both in Finland and Sweden. Again, the campaign negotiated locally in Finland was cheaper than the parts negotiated by the advertising agency.⁵⁰

The Choice Box was a whole new campaign tool; a room-wide box placed in European city centres, equipped with a computer and a camera, encouraging citizens to express themselves and leave a message to the MEPs. Some of the messages were diffused outside the box, on screens in Brussels and on the European Parliament's WebTV.⁵¹ In both countries, EU officials were very critical of the Choice Box. In Finland, it suffered from delays and technical problems, resulting in very little media interest. The box demanded huge human resources (EPIO staff needed to be available all the time when the box was open) and had many practical problems: it had no heating system and those working there sometimes felt insecure because there was no budget for hiring security guards.

“Well there were a few okay messages, but mostly you got to know the city's alcoholics when working there”, as an official at EPIO Helsinki puts it⁵².

In Sweden the launch of the Choice Box attracted a lot of media interest but officials still were very negative towards the project. The reasons were same as in Finland: it needed a lot of human resources and the outcome was unclear, there was practically no follow-up of what actually happened with the messages.⁵³

Audiovisual kits with celebrities encouraging people to vote were not picked up by media in Finland, probably because the celebrities were not that well-known in Finland (footballer Luis Figo was maybe the most famous of them)⁵⁴. EPIO Stockholm arranged their own event with Swedish celebrities, VIP early voting, where a number of Swedish celebrities together with Commissioner Margot Wallström voted on the first early voting day. The idea of gathering celebrities from different areas to vote and letting them tell why they voted managed to gain a lot of media attention.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *EE09 Campaign debriefing – Finland*, 2009.

⁵¹ *Overview of DG COMM activities for the 2009 European Elections*, p. 21.

⁵² Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Jaana Immonen (2010-03-30).

⁵³ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

⁵⁴ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

⁵⁵ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16).

Communication support material consisted of pens, notepads, post-cards etc. that helped promote the campaign by repeating the visual image.

3. Campaigning in Finland and Sweden

3.1 Resources

The campaign resources did not significantly differ between Sweden and Finland. I have not studied the campaign budgets, but it should be mentioned that both EPIOs budgets were bigger than on a non-election year, and that many of the campaign tools were not paid from the EPIOs budget, e.g. the production of the TV commercials.

The personal resources in the two EPIO offices are quite similar even though Sweden's population is almost twice as big as that of Finland. During the campaign EPIO Stockholm had eight officials and Helsinki seven; both offices also had interns during the campaign. Stockholm also got one extra employee during the last two weeks of the campaign. Both offices had three ADs and one of them was a press officer who only worked with media relations. In neither of the offices there were employees working only with secretarial tasks but all employees had some projects and responsibilities of their own.

In both offices the experience is that the campaign was a demanding process when it came to human resources. It was a big project for the relatively small offices and it did not help that resources sometimes were felt to be wrongly invested, as with the Choice Boxes⁵⁶. During my interviews in Sweden the demands of the campaign were emphasised even more, but in an almost positive tone; the head of the office describes it as a stress test and says that the staff reached their personal maximum. "Several of us worked 80 hours a week", he says⁵⁷.

Still the resources were relatively small, e.g. compared to the campaigns of the biggest parties, and creating cooperation networks was crucial in both countries.

"Our motto was that it is not most important what we do, but what we can convince others to do", says the head of EPIO Helsinki⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

⁵⁷ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

⁵⁸ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

The same goes for Sweden. In both countries the European Parliament and European Commission have far-reaching cooperation, starting from that they are physically located under the same roof. In Finland the other official cooperation partners were institutions that already communicate about the EU; Europe Information that is part of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Finnish Government and the Parliament of Finland. In Sweden the EPIO cooperated with the Commission, the Government Office of Sweden and with the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, but also with LSU, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations.

3.2 What did Sweden do and Finland not?

Much of what has been described this far has been similarities between the two offices' working methods and their experiences of the campaign. The fact is, though, that Sweden succeeded better in making their campaign visible to the large audience, and there are reasons behind this success. Both offices had the same main ideology: to focus on partnerships and to build media contacts and media attention, not to lead a massive advertising campaign. But in Sweden this thinking has been taken further and become more professionalised.

Sweden “did their own thing” during the campaign to a greater extent than Finland. They had their own projects and the centrally planned European elections 2009 campaign worked more as a support material, even though a very valuable one. In Finland the own projects were not as wide as in Sweden and the national campaign was more anchored to the central campaign.

3.2.1 Thinking in target groups

The work at EPIO Stockholm was during the campaign very much oriented towards three main target groups: media, teachers and youth.

“And it’s all about reaching the citizens. Which way should we go? (...) The best ways are the media and the school and education systems”, says the head of the Stockholm office⁵⁹.

Different projects were planned for the three target groups and in all projects the EPIO worked in cooperation with other institutions. The work started already before the election campaign and continues after it. The goal of the teachers' project was to meet all civics teachers in Swedish junior and senior high schools and at the time of this study the EPIO had met about half of the

⁵⁹ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

total 3 000 teachers. In this project, the EPIO worked together with the Commission and the Government Office of Sweden. They arranged further education on the EU and the European Parliament for teachers and often had a MEP with them to talk about the Parliament. The EPIO's presentation consisted of a nationally produced PowerPoint-presentation with film clips of the real legislative process at the Parliament and a lecture explaining what happens on the clips. According to EPIO officials, the lecture was highly appreciated and the teachers also said that a lot of the information was new to them. The project has been especially successful because it recently became obligatory for all Swedish schools to include EU knowledge on their syllabuses.⁶⁰

The youth project was implemented in cooperation with LSU, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations, which is an umbrella organisation for 80 different organisations. The EPIO educated 200 youth ambassadors who then continued to work in their own organisations around Sweden. The project also included campaign material, publications, home page and social media activities with guidelines on how young people can influence the issues important to them.

I will return to the media projects in chapter four.

3.2.2 How to reach the target groups?

There was target group thinking in Finland as well even though it was not as clear as in Sweden. One of the main differences between the countries was that in Finland the EPIO also tried to reach the target groups personally, on a face-to-face –level. Young voters formed a target group in Finland, too, and all first time voters received a letter informing about the European elections and encouraging them to vote. The letter was produced in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice.⁶¹

EPIO Helsinki also participated in mass events with information stand and program. Three main events during the campaign were Europe Day celebration at Linnanmäki amusement park, where EPIO was one of the organisers, World Village Festival and Naisten Kymppi (Ladies' 10 km run), where the EPIO participated in cooperation with the Commission. The World Village Festival is an ethnical music festival and the goal was to reach groups that are not easily reached

⁶⁰ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16).

⁶¹ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

otherwise, especially immigrants. Women were the target group at the Ladies' 10 km run, where the EPIO had a water-station and also a team of female MEP candidates participating in the run. Both these actions were successful in the way that a lot of material was given away and many people came to talk with the officials about EU and the elections. The Europe Day celebration suffered from bad weather and the parts of the program that were arranged outside did not attract a lot of audience.⁶²

In Sweden the EPIO practically did not participate in similar events at all. That was because of reasons already mentioned: the EPIO officials found it ineffective to approach citizens directly and concentrated on media and the education system instead.⁶³

“Of course the general public is our target too, but there are eight of us. (...) It is impossible to target the whole public”, says the deputy head at EPIO Stockholm⁶⁴.

4. Adaptation to media

According to the medialisatation hypothesis, in today's surplus of information the journalists act as gatekeepers and the political actors adapt to the notion of newsworthiness and media logic to gain attention. This development was clearly visible in the European Parliament's campaign, which from the beginning concentrated on building media attention instead of leading an extensive advertisement campaign⁶⁵. Firstly, there were the pure media actions, such as educating journalists and building contacts. Secondly, many of the advertising tools, such as the 3D street installations and Choice boxes, were designed to attract the media. EPIOs both in Sweden and Finland worked close to media, but again EPIO Stockholm did a little bit more.

In both offices the work with media starts with educating journalists on how EU and the European Parliament work. This work is naturally not limited to the election campaign. Since a number of years there is a scholarship program that brings journalists to Strasbourg to follow the plenary session and learn about EU. Sweden sends about 100 journalists a year to Strasbourg whereas Finland sends about 40. During spring 2009 this program was intensified in Sweden and

⁶² Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Jaana Immonen (2010-03-30).

⁶³ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16); Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

⁶⁴ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16).

⁶⁵ *Overview of DG Comm activities for the 2009 European Elections*, p. 6.

clearer target group thinking was introduced. In Finland the scholarships were concentrated so that most of the journalists travelling in 2009 did it before the elections.⁶⁶

Since editorial writers are among those who write about EU most frequently in Sweden, the Strasbourg scholarships were concentrated on them in spring 2009. Three special trips were arranged: one for members of the left-wing, one for the social democratic and one for the right-wing editorial writers' alliance. The EPIO had arranged a visit program that included meeting MEPs from both Sweden and other countries, even group leaders, to get a wider perspective of the Parliament's work. The visits EPIO Helsinki arranged for Finnish journalists were not as elaborate, but the journalists could often make their own program and did not always meet other than Finnish MEPs. In April and May 2009 EPIO Helsinki concentrated on inviting local and regional journalists and their schedule was somewhat more elaborate than usual⁶⁷.

4.1 Adaptation in practice

The cooperation between the EPIO and journalists seems to have worked well in both countries. The term cooperation can be discussed; the head of EPIO Stockholm for example does not want to use that word because bureaucrats and journalists have different goals. But the common understanding seems to be that no special tactics or tricks were needed to interest journalists in EU knowledge.

“It is every journalist's responsibility to cover this election. And if they don't have enough knowledge, then we fill a gap”, says the press officer in Stockholm⁶⁸.

The officials do not feel that they needed, or could, adapt the core message or the content of their communication to the media's needs. There is a communication from the Parliament and its core context is the same. Neither were they accused of being propagandistic. All in all, working with journalists seems in both countries have formed a win-win situation.⁶⁹

“And the journalistic mission includes monitoring and criticising the government, also the power that is used on EU level. And there we have a common interest. We want to be criticised; we

⁶⁶ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

⁶⁷ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

⁶⁸ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16).

⁶⁹ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30); EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16).

want to be reported about, the same way as in normal domestic politics” says the head of EPIO Stockholm⁷⁰.

When it comes to the two other possible forms of media adaptation, timing and format, the situation is different. On an everyday level, adaptation meant that EPIO staff in both countries tried to make it as easy as possible for journalists to participate in their seminars. They travelled to the media and educated them on location, sparing the media travel time and expenses. In Sweden the media tour was an extensive part of the campaign. In cooperation with the Swedish presidency, EPIO officials visited around 50 editorial offices in ten different towns. They contacted the largest media in every town, usually one TV channel, one radio channel and maybe two newspapers, and arranged for breakfast, lunch and afternoon meetings. Besides an official from EPIO and one from the presidency, their team included a journalist who had covered EU from Sweden and could guide the journalists on how to find interesting news while staying at home.⁷¹

Also in Finland that kind of education for journalists was extensive. Around 50 journalists participated alone from the public service channel YLE. As in Sweden, in most cases the EPIO took the initiative to these courses and seminars. What was different in Finland was that the EPIO did not have a journalist in their team and that the courses were arranged more individually compared to Sweden’s media tour.⁷²

Using the right language was another everyday form of adaptation: the EPIO officials are literally a link between the Parliament’s political work and the media and they have to talk about sometimes complicated issues in a straightforward and non-bureaucratic manner. This kind of thinking is naturally an important part of the officials’ work and something that comes with experience.

Besides providing basic information, another important part of the EPIOs’ journalist contacts was hinting about interesting stories, helping to find angles and interview persons. This was especially emphasised in Finland, where an EPIO official says that almost all important articles

⁷⁰ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

⁷¹ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16).

⁷² Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

about the Parliament were based on some contact with the EPIO⁷³. The interest from media towards the elections was bigger than ever in both countries; for example, the Press Officer in Finland had 1300 contacts with 400 journalists over a five-month period. In Sweden there was a conscious change-over from the proactive phase, where EPIO actively contacted the media, to the reactive phase where they mostly answered questions. In Finland the EPIO had not taken a decision on when to stop the proactive phase but it was the lack of resources that dictated what there was time for.⁷⁴

In both countries the EPIO officials also acted as commentators and interview persons in the media. In Helsinki it was mostly the head of the EPIO while in Sweden all three ADs were interviewed in the media. There was an extreme demand for neutral information about the elections in media and EPIO often filled the need – for example they participated in nine “morning sofas” on TV, which is probably more than one institution ever has done around one issue. These performances were very carefully planned at the EPIO Stockholm. Especially if the officials knew there would be tricky questions they practiced possible questions and answers beforehand. They also paid attention to not looking too “bureaucratic” on TV.

“What you remember from TV interviews is often what people are wearing, what they look like. (...) So it is also important not to necessarily wear an expensive Italian suit but an ordinary blouse”, says the press officer at EPIO Stockholm⁷⁵.

Finally, the EPIO Stockholm launched its campaign already in January with a debate article in *Dagens Nyheter*, the leading national newspaper. The headline was “Two out of three Swedes uninformed about the European elections”⁷⁶. The EPIO together with the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations promised to start working hard to change that fact. It was a conscious strategy to start that way: the debate page in *Dagens Nyheter* is very influential and indeed the article was picked up by many other media and was also the most blogged about article of the week. In Finland there was no corresponding start for the campaign but it was introduced to journalists through a series of lunch meetings and similar events. It should be

⁷³ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

⁷⁴ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16); EPIO Helsinki, Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

⁷⁵ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16).

⁷⁶ “Två av tre svenskar ovetande om Europaval”, www.dn.se, <http://www.dn.se/debatt/tva-av-tre-svenskar-ovetande-om-europaval-1.482619> (2010-05-22).

mentioned that there are no debate pages in Finnish newspapers that could be said to function the same way as that of *Dagens Nyheter*.

5. The campaign in a wider context

What has been described thus far has been factors that the campaigners can control or at least have influence on. The outcome of a campaign depends naturally on other factors as well, that are not under the campaign control.

5.1 Structural factors

Most of the structural factors influencing elections in Sweden and Finland were discussed in chapter one and I will here elaborate on two specific factors only.

Firstly, Finland's election system with preference voting shaped the common debate and political campaigning. In systems with preference voting, election campaigns tend to focus on individual candidates and that was the case also with the European elections. The star of the 2009 elections was Timo Soini, leader of the populist and EU-critical True Finns Party. The press loved to write about quick-witted Soini who kept delivering good quotations and the conversation often circled around his personal characteristics. Also many other candidates' campaigns circled around their character, presenting the candidate as a competent person but without much political content⁷⁷.

Even though preference voting is optional in Sweden, 59 percent of those who voted also took the chance to vote for a specific candidate. In two cases candidates were elected thanks to personal votes even though they were initially placed too low on the party list to gain a mandate. The most spectacular case was Kristdemokraterna's (the Christian Democrat Party) well-known senior candidate Alf Svensson's rise from place nine to the top of the list⁷⁸. Still, there was not the same focus on the personal qualities of the candidates as in Finland⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

⁷⁸ *Val till Europaparlamentet – Personröster*, www.val.se, <http://www.val.se/val/ep2009/slutresultat/personroster.html> (2010-05-05).

⁷⁹ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

Secondly, an important structural factor at least in Finland was the country's political culture and tradition. In Sweden the 2009 European elections were in many ways characterised by change (this will be discussed in more detail in 5.2), that was not the case in Finland. The political climate in Finland is traditionally rather consensus-seeking and even with the True Finns Party mixing it up the political campaign was relatively calm and matter-of-fact. If the matter-of-fact attitude is the positive side of a traditional debate, then the negative sides are focus on individual themes and on "what's best for Finland"⁸⁰.

5.2 Environmental factors

What is really interesting here is that the environmental factors, processes and issues that form the political climate at a given time, are not entirely independent of the European Parliament's information actions. It should be quite depressing for an EU official to state that they have no part whatsoever in the development of the political climate. On the contrary, years of information work should improve the quality of the discussion. At the same time it is obvious that an institutional information campaign is only one, and definitely not the most important, factor influencing the debate.

According to officials in both countries, the European elections debate in media was more extensive than ever before. But the debate circled around different things in the two countries. Even though there was discussion in Finland about the actual political choices, mostly among NGOs and to some extent in media, the political campaign continued on the old track. Individual candidates were one theme, and "Finland versus rest of Europe" was another. Even though Finland had moved on from discussing whether or not the country should be a member of the EU, it was still "stuck" on the discussion about what is best for Finland. The idea of EU as an arena where countries compete to get best benefits prevailed. This was a disappointment for the EU officials and did not match the themes of the institutional campaign, which stressed the different political choices.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

⁸¹ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30); Minna Ollikainen (2010-03-30).

”Of course our goal was not to mix with the political campaign, but I can say that when it comes to this, the communication campaign and the political campaign did not correlate”, says the head of the Helsinki office⁸².

Another factor that influenced the political climate in Finland was the election financing discussion that had been going on since the year before. There was extensive media attention and political discussion about the transparency of political parties’ campaign funding. The head of EPIO Helsinki says that because of the discussion, many possible candidates did not candidate. Because of this, the parties did not have many relevant ”top candidates”⁸³.

In Sweden on the other hand the debate was pretty much everything the EU officials had hoped for. For the first time the European elections debate reminded of the national elections: the discussion was about political issues and alternatives. Even more, the media reported extensively on how EU influences the everyday lives of people.⁸⁴ There were some tendencies in the same direction in Finland but they never really broke through.

Several reasons for the new kind of political debate in Sweden can be found. 2009 was “an EU super year” in Sweden. After the elections Sweden took over the EU presidency for the second half of 2009. There were more actors than ever communicating about EU and thus more chances for the message to get through. Moreover, the media took much more interest in the elections than earlier, and the reporting was of better quality.

“The combination elections and EU presidency forced them to get acquainted”, says head of EPIO Stockholm⁸⁵.

Also public opinion had turned in Sweden and was now more positive to EU than practically ever before. There is no room to go through possible reasons for this in this essay. I will only point out the findings already presented in chapter one: positive attitudes to European integration are connected to higher election participation.

Another factor was that the national political situation had changed. The right-wing alliance had won the last national parliament elections after a long period of Social Democratic dominance.

⁸² Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16); Marina Lähteenmaa (2010-04-16).

⁸⁵ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

The Swedish political field was more dynamic than it had been for a long time. In that situation the European elections also served as kind of a pre-election for the coming Parliament elections in 2010.⁸⁶

Finally, new kinds of issues had become central in media and on the political agenda and these were, luckily for the EP officials, issues that the European Parliament had a lot of power over. There was an extensive debate on internet access and integrity issues around the telecoms package. A new party, Piratpartiet (the Swedish Pirate Party) was formed around these issues and attracted especially young voters. If Timo Soini was the star of the Finnish elections, so was Piratpartiet the media's favourite in the Swedish elections. Media attention around them concentrated more on the actual issues than on certain politicians.

6. An institutional campaign

Through this study I have discussed the European Parliament's communication campaign in terms of medialisation and electoral force fields; theories most commonly used for political election campaigns. In this final part of the analysis I will emphasise the campaign's special, institutional character and its relation to political campaigning.

To act neutrally and correctly in their relation to the political parties was extremely important in both EPIOs. The officials were highly conscious of their role as representatives of the European Parliament as an institution. In the different activities that the EPIOs arrange, such as media seminars, the goal is always to have one or more MEPs participating, it is they who bring the substance to the European Parliament. Naturally the participants should be statistically representative of all the MEPs. In Sweden the institutional campaign not just stopped being proactive, but also stopped using both MEPs and candidates one and a half months before the elections⁸⁷. The goal was not to lead an active campaign at the same time as the political campaign⁸⁸. In Finland the candidates were part of the campaign all the way, but in the last

⁸⁶ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Björn Kjellström (2010-04-16).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16).

phases of the campaign, from May onward, also the presiding MEPs who candidate were treated as candidates, not as MEPs⁸⁹.

The officials in Helsinki felt that they for the most of the time succeeded in being neutral, but the head of the EPIO says that they probably should reconsider arranging activities with the candidates so close to the elections next time. Even though they included all the parties and the parties themselves got to decide which candidate they sent, there were some complaints of inequality. This goes back to the Finnish election system, which emphasises individual candidates and, especially in the last phases of the campaign, competition within parties⁹⁰.

Since Sweden did not use candidates in the institutional campaign, they had less problems of that kind. As an anecdote can be told that the blue colour associated with EU that was used in the campaign material is associated with a specific political party in Sweden.

“And when we put our Choice Box with this colour on the same square where this party was holding their information meeting, with the same colour, that day it might have been a little difficult for the citizens to know that we were not that political party”, says the deputy head of the office⁹¹.

When planning a campaign in 27 member countries it seems impossible to avoid these kinds of coincidences.

Officials neither in Finland nor in Sweden felt that they stepped on the political parties' territory with the institutional campaign. Not even the parties that were traditionally negative or critical to the EU in Finland protested against the campaign⁹². This can be seen as a sign of that the EPIOs generally managed well in their task of being neutral.

7. Findings and conclusions

This study aimed to describe and compare the European Parliament's communication campaigns in Finland and Sweden. In this final part of the study I will summarise the findings by answering the research questions.

⁸⁹ Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Interview: EPIO Stockholm, Markus Bonekamp (2010-04-16).

⁹² Interview: EPIO Helsinki, Pekka Nurminen (2010-03-30).

1. How were the campaigns planned and implemented?

The European Parliament's communication campaign for the 2009 elections was characterised by a high level of professionalisation. The campaign was based on re-thinking on three major issues: firstly, the same basic campaign was implemented in all member states; secondly, the campaign message emphasised political alternatives instead of civic duty; thirdly, the campaign concentrated on gaining media attention. The experiences of the central campaign were quite similar in Finland and Sweden. The officials found it a good thing that the campaign was genuinely European and they found most of the campaign tools useful in their work.

A main difference between the two countries when it comes to national campaign efforts was that EPIO Stockholm worked more clearly with distinctive target groups. They aimed to reach three groups; media, teachers and young people, and to do so they started three large-scale national projects in cooperation with other actors. There was practically no face-to-face campaigning "for the large audience", such as different outdoor events, in Sweden. In Finland participating in this kind of events was part of the campaign. My conclusion is that clear target groups are connected with a higher level of professionalisation. Different ways of reaching the target groups, on the contrary, do not necessarily mean more or less professionalisation. Despite their similarities, Sweden and Finland are two different countries and what works in Sweden would not necessarily work in Finland.

2. How did the campaigns adapt to the media's needs?

When it comes to the second interview question, there were more similarities than differences between the countries. If the medialisisation hypothesis means accepting that journalists are the most important gatekeepers in today's world and that in order to reach them, political actors should adapt to their logic, then the European Parliament's actions in both Finland and Sweden were clearly medialized. Behind this almost provoking statement is, though, a somewhat commonplace reality. The objects of this study were after all European Parliament Information Offices, which aim to inform the media about the European Parliament in an easy-to-understand way. Adapting to media is a built-in part of their work: it is about managing logistics and timetables in a way that is easy for the media, hinting the right journalist about the right article idea and presenting the message in a catchy, media-friendly way.

Media adaptation was important when it comes to timing and format, but the officials did not feel the need to or for that matter were able to adapt the content of their message. They felt that their message to the journalists was legitimate as it was: that it is every journalist's duty to be informed about, and criticise, the EU as a part of the political power structure.

3. How did the structural, environmental and resource factors influence the campaigns?

There were no significant differences between the two EPIOs' resources. Instead, the structural and environmental factors affecting the two campaigns were totally different. In Finland, the political climate and especially the political campaign were traditional for the European elections: there was no extensive discussion about political alternatives, but the campaign concentrated on individual candidates and on "what is best for Finland". In Sweden it was, for the first time, the political issues and the EU's affect on everyday life that were at the centre of the debate. Summarized, the political climate in Sweden matched the institutional campaign much better than in Finland.

Some factors behind the new political climate in Sweden were the new, more dynamic situation in national politics, more positive attitudes towards the EU and the EU presidency that coincided with the election year. Also new political issues, where the Parliament had extensive powers, became important in the debate. The media wrote more and in a new way about the Parliament.

This comparative study has shown an example of institutional campaigning on European level. The European Parliament's communication campaign was a huge, highly professionalised project implemented in 27 member countries. At the same time the comparison between two countries shows that national factors had considerable influence on the campaign. It was a campaign for Europe, in a clear context of national realities.

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Appendix 1

An example of the campaign material



The image shows two packages of raw chicken. The package on the left is wrapped in clear plastic and has no labels. The package on the right is also wrapped in clear plastic but has several labels: a red 'Best before' date label, a 'Raw Chicken' label with a detailed safety notice, a 'Please remove cover before heating!' warning label, and a 'Keep frozen' label. In the top right corner of the dark blue background, there is the European Parliament logo and the text 'EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'.

How much labelling do we need?

Use your vote in the European Parliament Elections on **4 June**.

www.elections2009.eu

4 June 2009
European Elections
IT'S YOUR CHOICE!

Appendix 2

Interview questions – a basic scheme

1. Planning and organisation
 - Please describe the planning process.
 - Please describe the goals of the campaign.
 - Please describe the organisation and work distribution at your office.
 - Was "media logic" considered when planning the campaign?
2. The issues
 - Which were the main arguments?
 - Which were the central issues?
3. Implementation
 - Please describe your role in the implementation of the campaign.
 - Please describe the cooperation with political parties and candidates.
 - Which issues were important in the general debate during the campaign?
 - Please describe the political climate during the campaign. Which events and incidents influenced your campaign?
4. Feedback
 - Please describe feedback from citizens.
 - Please describe feedback from political parties.
 - Please describe feedback from journalists.
5. Results
 - Please describe the results of the campaign. Was it successful?
 - Which actions were successful, which were not successful?
 - Did the campaign fit in the national context?