

The European elections in 2004

It was the first election after enlargement. It was also the first election after the establishment of European political parties, and so these were an important new instrument. They were not entirely new – because you had had these kinds of confederated groups of parties across states – but this gave the parties a new statute. The one issue which has been true in every European Parliament election, and regrettably was true in 2004 and again in 2009, is the near inability of European issues to find self-expression in European parliamentary elections. It has been nearly impossible so far. I travelled non-stop at the end of my mandate, speaking in a non-partisan way, so not for any side, on the European Parliament, on the new Treaty, on the enlargement, on all of these extraordinary positive energies. But in the end the turnout in the election of 2004 was quite variable – on average, it was relatively low – and failed to reverse the secular long-term trend of a decline in voter turnout. This is a serious issue. It has not gone away; in fact, it has intensified.