

# Women in Europe

## **An update on the gender make-up of the UK's European candidates**

In the last women's newsletter we provided you with a quick overall insight of the gender make-up of the candidates for the European Elections before the final nominations were announced on 7 May. We now have been able to update our information and here is what we have found.

Altogether 25 parties are putting forward candidates at the 2009 UK European Elections<sup>1</sup>. In addition, there are 9 independent candidates standing for the 69 seats available in the 9 regions.<sup>2</sup> Of the 874 candidates standing overall, 239 (or 27 per cent) are women. As touched upon in the newsletter the gender make-up of the parties does however vary between the different parties, ranging from 75 per cent for Plaid Cymru's candidates to no women for some of the smaller parties.

Below we have taken a look at how these figures compare to the 2004 elections. In addition, we have analysed the prospects of the candidates based on two possible outcome scenarios. While much of what will be is speculation, some assumptions about the future are nevertheless worth making.<sup>3</sup>

### **Looking back to 2004**

In 2004, there were 677 candidates altogether in the UK hoping to win the 75 seats up for election, 213 of which were women (31.5 per cent). 27 parties were putting forward candidates in 2004, and there were also 9 independent candidates standing. Outlined below is the gender-make up of the candidates for the winning parties in 2004. Interestingly, unlike this time around, the percentage of all the candidates standing concurs with the percentage of candidates standing for the 7 winning parties.

### **2004 candidates**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Female Candidates</b>	<b>Percentage Women</b>
Conservative Party	74	16	22
Green Party	68	22	32
Labour	75	37	49
Liberal Democrats	75	32	43
Plaid Cymru	4	2	50
Scottish National Party	7	1	14
UK Independence Party	75	10	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>32</b>

Despite, however, 32 per cent of the candidates in 2004 being women, the election results revealed that the gender make-up of the candidates elected was nowhere near as impressive, coming in at 24 per cent.

<sup>1</sup> One of these 'parties' is the Jury Team, which is more of a support network for Independent Candidates than a party.

<sup>2</sup> Again this is excluding Northern Ireland, as Northern Ireland uses a different electoral system to elect its MEPs. The number of seats available has this year been reduced from 75 to 69.

<sup>3</sup> We are concentrating in this section on the parties which either won seats in the last elections or which are predicted to have a chance of winning a seat.

## 2004 MEPs

Party	MEPs	Female MEPs	Percentage Women
Conservative Party	27	2	7
Green Party	2	2	100
Labour	19	7	37
Liberal Democrats	12	6	50
Plaid Cymru	1	1	100
Scottish National Party	2	0	0
UK Independence Party	12	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>

## Looking to the future

This year again, 32 per cent of the candidates standing for parties that are likely or could possibly win seats at the elections on 4 June are women. Doing remarkably better than in 2004 in terms of the number of female contenders, however, is the Conservative Party with 32 per cent of their candidates being female, compared to 22 per cent in 2004. In contrast to that, the Liberal Democrats lists show that only 29 per cent of their candidates are women. In 2004, 43 per cent of the Liberal Democrat candidates were female.

## 2009 candidates

Party	Candidates	Female Candidates	Percentage Women
BNP	69	12	18
Conservative Party	69	22	32
Green Party	69	29	42
Labour	69	33	48
Liberal Democrats	69	20	29
Plaid Cymru	4	3	75
Scottish National Party	6	1	17
UK Independence Party	69	13	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>32</b>

However, what becomes clear very quickly when analysing the possible outcomes is that what is important is not the how many women there are on the lists overall, but where on the lists they are being placed. Given that the closed party list system used for the European Elections in the UK<sup>4</sup> means that parties mostly win between 1 and 3 seats (depending on the size of the party and the size of the seat and how well they are doing in a particular election), the make-up of the candidates beyond that rarely matters.

While the overall number of female candidates has therefore not improved since 2004, or in the case of, for example, the Liberal Democrats even decreased, what has changed is the where on the list some of the parties are placing their women representatives. In addition, we are also seeing a changed electoral landscape, which also has an impact. And the difference in results is impressive, to say the least.

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<sup>4</sup> The UK uses closed regional list PR to elect its MEPs. For further information on how exactly this electoral system works, please visit our website: [www.electoral-reform.org.uk](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk)

In the case of the scenario based on a recent ComRes poll which finds Conservative support on 28 per cent, Labour at 20 per cent, UKIP at 15 per cent, Liberal Democrats at 14 per cent, Green Party at 11 per cent and BNP support at 4 per cent, women will fare hugely better than in the 2004 elections, with 33 per cent of the UK MEPs being female.

### **2009 MEPs - Scenario 1 (based on ComRes poll for UKIP/ Sunday Express 17 May 2009)**

<b>Party</b>	<b>MEPs</b>	<b>Female MEPs</b>	<b>Percentage Women</b>
BNP	0	0	N/A
Conservative Party	25	7	28
Green Party	6	3	50
Labour	16	6	38
Liberal Democrats	10	5	50
Plaid Cymru	1	1	100
Scottish National Party	2	0	0
UK Independence Party	9	1	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>33</b>

Based on an optimistic scenario for the Conservative Party which would see the Labour Party take 17 per cent, the Liberal Democrats 16 per cent, UKIP between 9 and 10, the Conservatives around 38 per cent of the votes, and in which the BNP will be up 2 and the Green Party up 1 per cent, we estimate that the UK European MEPs may in future be 35 per cent female, an increase of 11 per cent since 2004.

### **2009 MEPs - Scenario 2**

<b>Party</b>	<b>MEPs</b>	<b>Female MEPs</b>	<b>Percentage Women</b>
BNP	1	0	0
Conservative Party	33	9	27
Green Party	2	2	100
Labour	13	5	38
Liberal Democrats	12	7	58
Plaid Cymru	1	1	100
Scottish National Party	2	0	0
UK Independence Party	5	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>35</b>

### **What has changed?**

As touched upon above, what really matters with a closed list PR system is where on the list women are being placed, and it seems that this time around some of the key parties have finally taken the opportunities offered by the system to promote women, at least to some extent. The Conservative Party, for example, has this time around chosen a policy which on every occasion puts a woman in the position following a male incumbent, if the MEP wishes to stand for re-election. In addition, 5 of their retiring male MEPs have been replaced with female candidates. As a result of these actions, we may, despite for example

Labour possibly losing some women through loss of support and changes in the number of MEPs elected<sup>5</sup>, be moving closer to achieving something resembling equality in representation.

However, it is important to remember that while this time around some candidates may be elected in 4<sup>th</sup> or even 5<sup>th</sup> position on the list, such an electoral success is not a certainty every year. It is therefore still as important today as it was before the last election to ensure that women in the future stand the same chances of coming first on the list as men.

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<sup>5</sup> This, however, is likely to have little impact on the overall percentage of female Labour MEPs, as Labour has chosen to put female candidates in some of the seats currently held by male MEPs.