

ELECTION SPECIAL

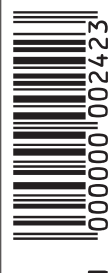
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SAVIOUR BALZAN
page 11

€0.50



Joseph Muscat trounces GonziPN



**LABOUR PARTY WINS EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS WITH 54.81% OF FIRST COUNT VOTES
PN 40.48% AD 2.13% OTHERS 2.59%**



**AS GREENS FLOUNDER NORMAN LOWELL'S FASCIST
PARTY GARNERS AROUND 2% OF VOTE - PAGES 6-7**



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MEP
ELECTIONS 2009
– minute for minute

14:28: PN Secretary General Paul Borg Olivier: “57% for PL, 40% for PN. We’ll give you details later.

14:44: AN candidate Malcolm Seychell: “We still have to make an analysis of what happened, although indications show that results will be comparable to what we achieved in the general elections. It is clear however that the bigger parties hijacked our issues to their benefit.”

14:45: A good number of votes from the 12th district were considered null as they all delivered the same wrongly spelt message on the ballot sheet. “No kacca no voote” (sic), the message reads (No hunting, no vote).

14:48: PL Secretary-General Jason Micallef confirms that his samples show a 54-55% majority for PL. “We have the right to show satisfaction and sport a smile today. To celebrate this result, we’re meeting after 19:00 opposite the PL headquarters but nobody has the right or the permission to organise anything else in villages or elsewhere. I appeal for calm and respectful celebrations.”

14:54: “PL 33,000-35,000 votes ahead of PN” – Jason Micallef

14:57: PL Leader Joseph Muscat decides to show up at Naxxar counting hall at a later stage, PL sources say.

15:06: PL MP Charles Mangion “It is certainly a satisfying result which shows how much the PL is close to families. The campaign that Joseph Muscat made revolved around those issues affecting families most. This is the result of such a campaign.”

15:12: Joseph Muscat may not show up at all at counting hall. “His official address will be delivered at party HQs at 19:00.” – PL

15:17: Percentages given by parties are based on “worst case scenario’s” – PN official

15:18: “I appeal to government for fair play” – PL Deputy Leader Tony Abela on One News. Announces Mass Rally at PL Headquarters in Hamrun.

15:19: Percentages: PL/PN officials, “probable 54% PL and 42% PN”

15:20: Joseph Muscat speaking via telephone with PBS/TVM: “The electorate has sent a clear message to government that it wants a change in political direction. Just a year after PN’s electoral victory, it seems that PN must start to take stock of the situation.”

15:25: Deputy Prime Minister and PN Deputy Leader Tonio Borg, “We admit that the electorate has sent us a clear message that we must analyse and understand. We are disappointed at the result. The result is a reality for us. We would be silly to ignore. Government has a programme to implement for five years and we will pursue it to the full.”

15:28: Deputy PM Tonio Borg: “Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi will address a press conference at Dar Centrali PN at 18:00hrs.” ▶ pg6

Gonzi’s government



Scenes of jubilation at the Mile End where Joseph Muscat (pictured) was warmly greeted

KARL STAGNO-NAVARRA

OPPOSITION and Labour party leader Joseph Muscat last night declared that the electorate had sent a clear message to Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, whom he accused of leading a government that “is falling to pieces.”

Addressing a delirious crowd outside the PL headquarters in Hamrun, Joseph Muscat said the vote was clearly not one of protest, but a “clear choice for Labour.”

Amid chants of “Joseph! Joseph!” from the huge crowd that thronged the Mile End, the PL leader said the Maltese have explicitly used their vote to tell the Prime Minister they are “fed up” at being taken for a ride, and that “they will not be tolerating this situation any longer.”

Joseph Muscat insisted however that Saturday’s vote was clearly not a protest vote, but a clear choice for Labour, that has started to lead all Maltese towards a “brand new dawn”.

He explained that the result rewards the PL for its efforts to strengthen the “new coalition of ideas and opinions, that does not look back at yesterday’s divide between red or blue,” but looks ahead to bring “change” to the country.

“This movement bringing workers and people from all strata in society is indeed the start of a brand new beginning,” he told the cheering crowd.

Accompanied by his wife Michelle, Joseph Muscat expressed his satisfaction at the electoral result, thanking all



Muscat is joined by deputy leader for party affairs Toni Abela (left)

responsibility’

for, but better than expected”



MEP Simon Busuttil looks on as Gonzi takes questions from the press



Finally an appearance. PN secretary-general Paul Borg Olivier has to answer for the PN's defeat despite not having taken a leading role in the campaign

would be a third seat for the PN, if and when the Lisbon Treaty is fully ratified across Europe, with MEP David Casa and Roberta Metsola Tedesco Triccas joining Busuttil in Brussels.

As for Labour, it was clear that MEP incumbent Louis Grech was heading straight for re-election, while former MP Joseph Cuschieri, Edward Scicluna, as well as Marlene Mizzi and Claudette Abela Baldacchino were battling it out for the remaining two seats.

Far-rightist Norman Lowell and Arnold Cassola were reportedly running neck and neck throughout the race. Collectively, Lowell, Azzjoni Nazzjonali, Libertas candidate Mary Gauci and independent candidates garnered 2.59% altogether.

Facing the first press conference after his defeat, Prime Minister and Nationalist Party leader Lawrence Gonzi claimed the final result for the PN was “worse than we wished for, but better than expected.”

Gonzi said that at one point the PN feared that even its second seat was in jeopardy and that turnout would be as low as 75%. According to Gonzi this scenario would have meant a projection of 35% for the PN, instead of the actual 40%.

With a delivery that was seemingly better than his electoral campaign addresses, a somewhat relieved Lawrence Gonzi spelt out a number of mistakes committed by his administration.

MaltaToday asked Gonzi whether the blame for the defeat could be laid on the GonziPN

strategy, considering that mathematically it was proven that thousands of former Nationalist votes had switched to Labour, and whether he would be shouldering the responsibility of this defeat.

“Yes. I have no doubt that there were Nationalists who voted Labour. And there were Nationalists who did not cast there vote. I received emails myself. I know some of the reasons,” Gonzi said.

“There are genuine reasons that I personally acknowledge that we could have addressed them. I am disappointed myself, my own government, that it took us months leaving these people without a solution,” he said.

“At times I am angry at myself. I question, why do we leave someone waiting for all these months? And then because the Prime Minister intervenes, in just one week the issue is solved.

“I shoulder my responsibility. Always. And this is my duty. I am the leader of the party and I am the prime minister of this county. This is a huge privilege. It is an honour that brings responsibility with it. I shoulder all the responsibility in good times and bad. When I won I celebrated and when I lost I tried to see what I needed to address.”

Repeatedly during his address, Gonzi insisted that his party needs to be “closer to the people”.

Indirectly attacking PN secretary-general Paul Borg Olivier, who was sitting right by his side, Gonzi reminded the pub-

lic that he had instructed Borg Olivier to renew the document “Xibka tal-komunikazzjoni” (A network of communication), a document compiled by Gonzi himself way back when he was actively involved in the party.

Facing MaltaToday’s questions on whether this document was ready, Borg Olivier struggled to give a clear answer. At one point he stated that the work had already started and that “discussions are ongoing but when the election approached these had to be postponed.”

But shortly after, Borg Olivier said: “internally the party has finalised this document... and it will be taken up to the next level for discussion.”

Gonzi stressed the need for his party to keep a close and direct link with the electorate in the next four years. He said that when ministers and MPs called at people’s homes, this had left a positive result. Gonzi said he would strongly insist in seeking ways how all the ministers and MPs could keep this work going throughout the whole legislature.

Gonzi however did not commit himself on a possible Cabinet reshuffle: “If I feel that if it is in the national interest, I will take that decision. If not, I won’t.”

During the press conference Gonzi failed to convince on a number of issues directly related to his party’s defeat analysis. Acknowledging that water and electricity bills, MEPA reform and immigration were some of the problems leading to this result, Gonzi pledged to bring about the necessary changes.

However, he ruled out the possibility of a revision in the electricity tariffs. Lawrence Gonzi said that the government would seek that the reduced tariffs offered to 30,000 poor families are truly enjoyed by those who really deserve them.

Gonzi also said that now the election was over, his government could finally distribute the free energy-saving bulbs to families – an electoral promise that had left many wondering when it would be fulfilled. Gonzi said the bulbs would lead to a sharp decline in electricity consumption.

In closing, Gonzi said there the country would return to be in a stronger position and that all his electoral promises would be implemented by the end of his five-year legislature. “We have an electoral programme. I want to make this clear. Will the government keep its electoral promises? Categorically, my answer is: we will keep all our promises.”

“I am in office and in power,” Gonzi told journalists who expressed doubt whether he was actually in control. He said on Monday he would summon all five elected MEPs, and the sixth MEP-to-be, to Castille to “identify the work ahead” inside the European Parliament.

All PN MEP candidates were present for Lawrence Gonzi’s address except Frank Portelli, who appeared to have been left bruised by the electoral defeat. When contacted and asked for the reason for his absence, Portelli said: “I was at Mater Dei seeing to my wounds incurred from this defeat.”

Frank Portelli ‘wounded’ from electoral defeat

JULIA FARRUGIA

NATIONALIST candidate Frank Portelli was missing from the line-up of MEP candidates sitting behind Lawrence Gonzi in his press conference, reportedly “seeing to his wounds” from yesterday’s defeat.

Asked why he was not present for the press conference, the

doctor simply replied he was “in a queue at Mater Dei and unable to be with the Prime Minister.”

A quick-witted Portelli said: “I’m at Mater Dei in a queue to see to my wounds from the massive trashing the PN took in this election.”

He later SMSed voters with the same message. With his sense of humour still intact,

Portelli – a former Nationalist MP – said he was “greatly disappointed” at the result, given that the European issues of the campaign were overshadowed by domestic issues.

Portelli said the hike in utility rates proved to be the PN’s undoing. “There were people asking me, ‘why are we paying high rates to make up for the mistakes of those who bought

oil at a high price?’ I had no answer to that.”

“In another country, resignations would have followed,” Portelli said about the high cost of oil procurement.

He added that another bad tactic was the fact that voters had just received their electricity and water bills in the last two days of the electoral campaign.

MEP ELECTIONS 2009 – minute for minute

13:16: Party delegates input their first samples. An element of cross-vote from PN to PL noticed on table sorting Sliema votes.

13:19: “It is clear that four or five PL candidates will have very close results” – Steve Borg (PL candidate). Asked whether he considers himself to be one of these candidates, Borg said: “No, I never sought to be populist in the campaign. My intention was to give a different dimension to the environmental issue.

13:22: Simon Busuttil proves to be a favoured choice among many voters. With regard to PL candidates, it is too early to discern popularity as, at first glance, PL votes seem to be well-spread among candidates.

13:27: Joseph Cuschieri (PL) – “The support for me seems to be encouraging so far, especially when you see that there are indications of my support being comparable to Edward Scicluna’s”

13:31: “It is too early to have any indications” – PL President Stefan Zrinzo

13:33: AD Chairperson Arnold Cassola – “Support for AD seems to be weak (tidher fjakka)”

13:46: “From samples obtained, results for PL look very encouraging. Three of the seats are in for sure.” – PL source

13:50: PN candidate Rudolph Cini: “It is too early to tell. Whether I will be elected or not will very much depend on second preference votes”

13:52: PN registers loss on votes garnered from the 10th district when compared to 2004 EP elections

13:57: PN candidate Marthese Portelli ahead of Simon Busuttil from votes cast in Gozo

14:03: An overjoyed Marthese Portelli tells MaltaToday: “I must thank Gozitans for trusting me. I came on the list at very short notice, just two months ago – so the campaign was very short. I did not have much money either, so the campaign was mostly based on word of mouth.”

14:06: PL garners around 55% of 1st count votes – first samples show

14:11: PL leader Joseph Muscat announces absolute majority for PL. “We’ve delivered a message for the creation of a new movement and people responded to it. This new movement gathers all those who voted PL in the past and others who voted for PL the first time round. This is a very clear signal to Lawrence Gonzi. This result is a point of departure for the movement, and not a point of arrival”

14:13: Toni Abela, PL deputy leader – “Let’s celebrate with our feet on the ground. We have a comfortable majority, an absolute majority.”

14:18: First indications show that Norman Lowell is faring better than AD, AN candidates

14:27: First samples show that 10th District vote for PL jumped from 20% to 23-24%

MEP
ELECTIONS 2009
– minute for minute

Saturday 6 June

15:00: 2pm electoral district turnouts: lowest in 12th district (Mellieha, Rabat) at 21%. Highest in 1st district (Valletta, Floriana) with 42%

15:45: PN supporter suffers light injuries in argument outside Zejtun polling station. Police make arrests

16:00: Injured PN electoral agent is Grezzju Bondin, allegedly attacked by Labour supporter Edwin Bartolo – witnesses

20:31: Labour condemns Zejtun aggression, ‘Bartolo not representing Labour in any way’ – PL spokesman

Sunday 7 June

00:04: Labour quotes “unofficial” turnout at 78%

00:54: Electoral Commission: official 2009 elections turnout 79%, lowest ever, down from 83% (2004 turnout)

10:50: Sorting of votes continues in earnest at the Naxxar counting centre as the 12:00 deadline for the counting of first-count votes approaches. NET TV anchor says that the most important thing in this election is not the nationwide percentage but the number of seats obtained.

12:03: 12pm target to start sorting of votes delays. Officials attribute the delay to a larger size ballot sheet, making the physical sorting of sheets slower.

12:30: Neither of the PN or PL candidates have yet arrived at the counting hall. AD leader and EP candidate Arnold Cassola and AN candidate Martin Seychell have been seen.

12:34: Shifts of counting agents to change soon. Party officials prepare for sorting process in the next minutes.

12:36: PN and PL counting agents take their place against perspex already, sorting has not yet started.

12:39: Tables set for sorting to commence. Party officials seen at counting hall.

12:42: Electoral commission officials handing out instructions to counting agents. Sorting a question of minutes

12:45: Candidates present at counting hall – Edward Demicoli (PN); Christian Zammit (PL); Arnold Cassola (AD); Martin Seychell (AN); Nazzareno Bonnici (Partit tal-Ajkla)

12:50: Sorting of Number One votes starts. Packs of 50 votes being handed down on tables.

12:51: PN frontrunner Simon Busuttil arrives at counting hall

12:54: PN and PL agents bang on perspex to draw the attention of Electoral Commission staff for the amount of votes handed down from each box at a time. According to rules, a pack of 50 votes from each box is to be handed down at a time. Elcom officials were handing down two packs at a time.

13:01: PN General Secretary Paul Borg Olivier arrives

13:06: PL candidates Louis Grech, Marlene Mizzi and Edward Scicluna arrive at counting hall

13:14: Disagreement on validity of votes triggers heated debate among PN and PL agents. Police called in to calm down the situation.

Gonzi – ‘I assume

PM describes result as “worse than we wished

JULIA FARRUGIA

MEP Simon Busuttil led the electoral race yesterday as expected, with Nationalist electoral agents saying he would easily garner anything close to 53,000 first count votes – well over the 40,000 quota.

Despite the success of the PN frontrunner, his party leader had to face a humiliating defeat at the hands of Labour’s absolute majority of 54% compared to the PN’s 40% – up one per cent from their disastrous 2004 outing – while Alternattiva Demokratika floundered at a dismal 2.13%, their worst showing after their successful 9.3% in 2004.

Displaced by some 30,000 votes, it was clear that Lawrence Gonzi’s electoral victory of 2008 had now swung back to Labour. The sole consolation



Not a good day for Gonzi, who now faces the flak for the electoral defeat

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAY ATTARD

After the defeat, the blame game starts

KARL STAGNO-NAVARRA explains how the PN grassroots’ core has reacted to Gonzi’s “bunch of newcomers”

LABOUR’S landslide victory yesterday immediately flung open the doors to the blame game that has started within the PN.

Within seconds from PN secretary-general Paul Borg Olivier’s appearance on all TV stations broadcasting from the Naxxar counting hall, conceding the heavy defeat to labour, you could clearly see the divisions within the PN counting agents and delegates.

Party counting agents and delegates are grassroots supporters and canvassers to most of the PN parliamentary group, and when they speak you can clearly detect what is brewing within the party.

The diehard grassroots support is firmly anchored in the Eddie Fenech Adami legacy, while others are known for their allegiance to PN leader Lawrence Gonzi.

What was interesting to note is that in Naxxar, PN representatives were already prepared for defeat, but were shocked to learn of the scale of the defeat. Those who first got wind of a possible 57% win for Labour with an average 30,000 to 35,000 votes majority, triggered the whispering campaign on the blame game.

It was more than evident from the Lawrence Gonzi loyalists that the guns must turn onto Borg Olivier, when in reality he had absolutely nothing to do with the campaign.

Instead he was solely allocated the humiliating role of giving a brave face on TV to

concede defeat and announce the shocking result.

Listening to the conversations between the usual cliques inside the PN canteen in Naxxar, the Fenech Adami

tate the PN’s political agenda. Others have turned their guns on Investments Minister Austin Gatt, blamed for the way the utility tariffs were introduced, and accused of

cal when MEP Simon Busuttil entered the counting hall and gave his comments to Net TV. A group of PN delegates close to table 5 were heard commenting between themselves,



Things are not looking good for some of these gentlemen

loyalists were evidently angry to learn about the immediate manoeuvres to blame Borg Olivier for the defeat, and in turn were aiming their guns on the so called ‘newcomers bunch’ who are close to Gonzi and work in his secretariat in Castille.

They claim these have become too “over-confidently powerful” and that they dic-

being “arrogant” by not being around on voting day, saying he was seen in Gozo sporting shorts and enjoying the sun.

The Austin Gatt posse – predominantly present with security tags – were livid to hear these whispers and were heard spreading the word that Gatt was instructed to stay away from the campaign.

The situation turned farci-

“here he comes... he will get it too...”

The blame game will take another dimension this morning, when the factions inside the PN headquarters will start plotting their strategy. Their battlefield will be the upcoming PN General Council, where their armies will surely clash.

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Electoral special



Simon Busuttill's first count votes pile up in the opening rounds of the vote counting, while assistant electoral commissioners supervise the counting process.



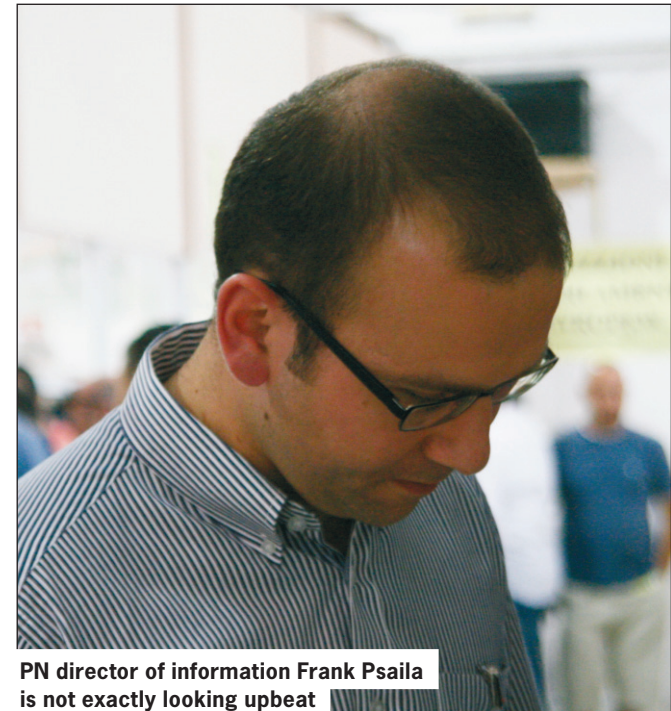
PN candidate Marthese Portelli



Bad times for Arnold Cassola and Alternattiva Demokratika which only managed to get 2.13% of the vote



Austin Gatt's right-hand Emanuel Mallia (right) Victor Scerri keeping an eye on the counting



PN director of information Frank Psaila is not exactly looking upbeat



Job well done for A

A personal triumph for Joseph Muscat

Last year's defeat can be squarely blamed on Alfred Sant, but yesterday's victory was a personal triumph for Joseph Muscat's Labour-lite brand, JAMES DEBONO says



IN the space of a year Joseph Muscat has pushed all the right political buttons and put Labour ahead by 15 percentage points with its definitive electoral swing that signalled a change in the popular mood.

Only a year ago during Labour's internal leadership contest Nationalists pundits had written off Muscat as a continuation of Sant's legacy, arguing that by dumping George Abela, Labour would remain unelectable.

But Muscat has not only managed to inspire the Labour core vote. He has managed to make inroads among floating voters and former Nationalist voters. Unlike Sant, Muscat does not inspire fear or uncertainty in an electorate suffering from fatigue after two decades of Nationalist rule.

And unlike Sant, despite his very young age he has proved himself as an astute leader who does not provide his adversaries with embarrassing soundbites such as Sant's promise to "reopen the EU package".

Nationalist pundits tried to



Good reason to be cheerful for Labour leader Joseph Muscat

blame their colossal defeat on the higher rates of abstention in Nationalist districts. But this is only part of the truth. MaltaToday surveys had predicted

that 4.8% of Nationalist voters in 2008 would vote Labour this time around.

And more significantly a survey held in January showed

Labour leader Joseph Muscat enjoying a higher trust rating than Lawrence Gonzi. Significantly 10% of respondents who claimed to have voted PN in

the last election now trusted Muscat more than Gonzi.

Ironically despite Labour's triumph, Malta has inched towards the right in these elections. On immigration Labour was in synch with the popular mood, but it is has drifted to the positions of the hard right. This was partly compensated by a more progressive stand on gay rights and divorce.

The PN's moral conservatism was definitely a turn-off for many middle of the road liberal voters. You could say that Labour is one of the few members of the Party of European Socialists to win – and largely because of voters' fatigue with the PN.

Ultimately Muscat's vision on economic and environmental matters remains obscure.

For the moment Muscat has built a coalition of the disgruntled kept together by his charisma and tact. In four years' time, voters will ask questions on how Muscat will govern the country. Now he has turned Labour into a government-in-waiting.

This election spells trouble for Gonzi

The grumbling in Gonzi's backbench means the Prime Minister is facing his most difficult moment yet. By MATTHEW VELLA

PRIME Minister Lawrence Gonzi will look back at his most terrible week in politics since being re-elected to power last year with just 1,600 votes, and take a long, hard look at the trouble ahead.

Back in March 2008 he had failed to secure an absolute majority in a cliffhanger elec-

tion which left him with a problem of legitimacy. But since then, has the Prime Minister learnt his lesson to "listen to the people"?

Not quite, it seems. Newly elected leader Joseph Muscat won his first electoral test with his Labour-lite creed and his 'coalition of the dis-

gruntled'. He led a campaign on popular, domestic issues: the hastily introduced utility bills and the increasing cost of living, and to an extent illegal immigration. But it was a campaign targeted at Lawrence Gonzi, or GonziPN as he was re-packaged in March 2008.

Muscat led his campaign by looking back at 15 months of GonziPN, attacking the prime minister and the decisions of his closest ministers – investments minister Austin Gatt, author of the hiked utility bills, and finance minister Tonio Fenech. He attacked them on promises they did not keep, on the retroactive billing on water and electricity right at the height of the global financial crisis, for ignoring the falling price of oil.

Muscat found the unhappiness in the electorate ripe for the picking, but it's the swing he captured yesterday that means the tide is turning in Maltese politics.

With Labour's absolute majority of 54-55%, the electoral swing from the 2008 elections shows Gonzi losing the people who voted him for "peace of mind" and his "pair of safe hands". As Labour had it in its own billboards, Gonzi no longer meant peace of mind but "headache".

So what does Gonzi do next? He faces trouble inside his party. Unhappy backbenchers and former ministers will face their leader with some questions. Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando's interview in MaltaToday

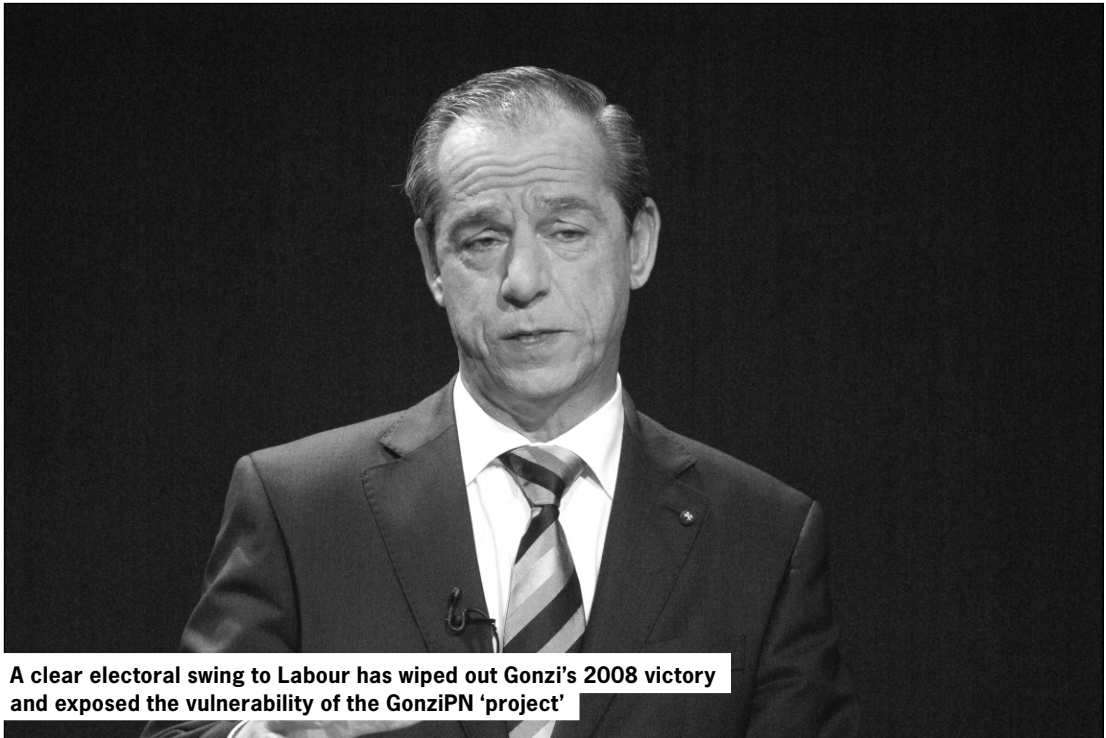
on Sunday said as much. The PN's secretary-general Paul Borg Olivier was nowhere to be seen in this campaign, which was led by candidate and MEP Simon Busuttil.

And Gonzi's hollow threat to reshuffle his Cabinet will only leave him gasping for air as he estranges allies; what could that change inside the PN?

Gonzi has committed grave mistakes on the management of the country's finances and must face the flak on irresponsible governance. His mistakes, especially the great utility rates' hike, have cost taxpayers dearly and now he is left with egg on his face.

His problems also lie within the raison d'être of the Nationalist Party. For all its self-styled 'europeanism', the PN remains unwilling to shake off a conservative core on matters which alienate its liberal, middle-class vote: divorce and party financing, a dismal environmental record, and accusations of nepotism.

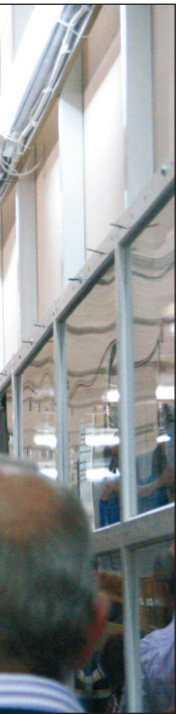
Gonzi has underestimated his electorate. This electoral result was a clear verdict on his government's track record so far, and the meltdown of the repackaged GonziPN that won the 2008 elections.



A clear electoral swing to Labour has wiped out Gonzi's 2008 victory and exposed the vulnerability of the GonziPN 'project'

napshots

Photography by Ray Attard and Denise Scicluna



Labour candidate Steve Borg smiles for the camera and deputy prime minister Tonio Borg concedes defeat at the Naxxar counting hall



t) and PN president



How's it going in there? Labour candidate Marlene Mizzi has a word with a counter from behind the perspex, and Labour international secretary Alex Sceberras Trigona wipes the sweat off his brow in anticipation of the result



nglu Farrugia, Labour deputy leader for parliamentary affairs, and Joseph Cuschieri, the former MP who could be set for Brussels



PN deputy leader and deputy prime minister Tonio Borg

Say goodbye to GonziPN. Now what next?

Victor Scerri – the PN president who is building himself some silly contraption, sanctioned by MEPA, in the pristine setting of Bahrija – stated in a comment that the landslide victory for Joseph Muscat was not a vote of no confidence in Lawrence Gonzi.

If Victor Scerri believes his own precious words, then really it is high time for him to retire once and for all from politics and set up a permanent residence in Bahrija. (Oh and by the way: pity Alan Deidun, the not very successful PN candidate, did not have time to look into this interesting piece of development. Nor for that matter did the PM, who is supposedly responsible for MEPA.)

Seriously, if Scerri believes that the thousands of Nationalists who voted Labour, and the thousands who chose not to vote at all, were not transmitting a message to Lawrence Gonzi, then he must be right.

Surely the 35,000 odd Labour majority must all be voters with a secret fetish for Joseph Muscat.

Yesterday was the clearest message of no confidence in GonziPN possible, and no matter what is said or stated, Gonzi has a serious problem of legitimacy.

He has no one to blame but himself. And if he thinks he can walk away from this one, he is very mistaken.

I remember years back when Pierre Portelli, then as now one of Gonzi's faithful, stated that with Gonzi, the PN would always win. Well, it seems that times are a-changing.

Gonzi simply saying he takes full responsibility is not enough. Nor is simply saying that he will listen from now on.

His politics of "us and them" has to change. And when I refer to "us and them", I am not only talking about "blues and reds", but I am specifically referring to those blues who are not in the Gonzi clan.

But yesterday's vote has nothing to do with the Gonzi faction, or the Dalli faction, or the Austin Gatt faction. It has much to do with this perceived notion that this administration is simply not delivering and that the government is detached from the people.

And none of the motley crew of candidates presented by Gonzi seems to have altered that impression.

In the last five years, Gonzi has placed his persona at the centre of the PN. Needless to say, every achievement that has come Gonzi's way was

credited to himself, but it was not of his doing but a consequence of what his predecessors had set out to do.

When Gonzi stood at Upper Barrakka and took credit for European accession in 2004, everyone remembered that this would not have happened had it not been for Fenech Adami.

Before that, Gonzi was nowhere to be seen.

When the Euro was introduced, it was the natural consequence of EU accession. And yet Gonzi gave the impression that the whole changeover was his brainchild.

The real legacy of Gonzi can be appreciated in: a mismanaged government; a lack of direction; a disunited party; the poor media that emanates today from Triq id-Duluri, Pietà; the angry backbenches; the lack of magnanimity towards others in the party; and the singular choice of people in agencies who lack competence (but not allegiance).

But worst of all, Gonzi's administration has invested in promulgating the same clique of sycophants who depend on this administration to survive.

Today there are two PN's: GonziPN and the PN.

Gonzi has no idea of shame. When asked a few days back about an auditor's report on the scandalous issue of direct orders at Mater Dei, Gonzi unashamedly said he would ignore procurement procedure and repeat the same thing. No one had the temerity to report his comment.

Gonzi's great talent is to give the impression that he cares, but in reality he is a prisoner of his great indecisiveness.

The only two people who take decisions in his cabinet are Austin Gatt and John Dalli. The others, with all due respect, simply do not have the character to lead.

Yesterday as I watched and listened to Mario Schiavone and Pierre Portelli on NET TV commenting on yesterday's result I noticed two individuals in denial.

Instead of eating humble pie, Mario Schiavone – who also stands in as an independent journalist – chose to describe anyone who switched political allegiance as that archetypal person who had a garage in a narrow alley, and had the alley blocked by bollards.

What a load of... bollards. No wonder GonziPN is out of touch. If the thousands who switched sides were indeed angry voters with a bollard problem, I am sure this is a good enough reason for



SAVIOUR BALZAN

Gonzi to stay on as PM and leader.

GonziPN will be very quick to blame Austin Gatt and Borg Olivier for this electoral result. But the reality is that without Austin Gatt, Lawrence Gonzi would not be able to peel an egg.

If Austin Gatt came to cabinet with the stupid suggestion of having a utility tariff price hike, the responsibility for taking up the suggestion and implementing it was the PM's and no one else's.

And if Gonzi's boys want to blame Paul Borg Olivier for the campaign they had better start pointing their fingers at Simon Busuttil too, the man who refused to stand as secretary general because his job in Brussels was simply too lucrative to abandon.

If the PM had any sense, he would call his parliamentary group now and put the whole issue of his leadership to a vote of confidence.

He could set about realising that he cannot go on having a country run by a small clique of flatterers. He would have to introduce meritocracy and do away with political apartheid.

But this is easier said than done.

As Labour controlled its feverish excitement I could not help noticing Alex Sciberras Trigona being interviewed on Super One. Can Muscat ask some carpenter to build a big large box and lock AST in it for the next four years?

AST really does not quite realise what year we are living in. In search of a comparison to yesterday's results, AST chose to refer to... 1981.

By the way, where is Richard? How come I did not see him with Gonzi?

Oh, I forgot... Richard Cachia Caruana only appears when the party wins.

Goodbye Alternattiva. Perhaps it is time for a Green party which stands for something, not a political party that was scared to mention divorce and other burning issues. Not a party that seemed only geared to work for the rerouting of one person back to Brussels.

What a pity! What a pity the Nationalists never appreciated the value of third party politics in 22 years and continued to postpone electoral reform.

“

The real legacy of Gonzi can be appreciated in: a mismanaged government; a lack of direction; a disunited party; the poor media that emanates today from Triq id-Duluri, Pietà; the angry backbenches; the lack of magnanimity towards others in the party; and the singular choice of people in agencies who lack competence (but not allegiance)



Echoes of 1996

LAST Wednesday, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi pre-empted yesterday's result by claiming that this election was not a "vote of confidence" in his government. But he also acknowledged that he would "take cognisance" of the indications of the result, and take the necessary decisions accordingly.

Yesterday, a stern-faced Gonzi faced the press once more, this time with the preliminary results in hand. The indications are clear even from a cursory glance: around 55% of first-count preference votes went to the Labour Party this time, while the Nationalist Party secured 40% of the overall vote. The difference between the two parties in this election stands at around 35,000 votes: around double the 17,000 votes that separated the same two parties in 1996.

Few would deny that this represents a colossal defeat for the party in government, which currently clings to power by a single parliamentary seat, after an election fought almost exclusively on the central figure of Lawrence Gonzi himself.

And unlike five years ago – when the PN lost by a narrower

margin – there is less room to manoeuvre when it comes to apportioning blame.

With less than a third of its 2004 tally of 9%, the Green Party's showing can only be described as an electoral disaster. As such, the PN can no longer accuse Arnold Cassola of "siphoning off" its votes to the benefit of Labour (although this did not stop some commentators from trying).

Alternattiva Demokratika has been exposed as an electoral irrelevance this time round, and the implications for Gonzi are inescapable: a substantial portion of traditionally Nationalist voters did not merely register a protest vote by voting for AD; they have undeniably jumped ship, and voted for the party in Opposition.

These are unmistakable echoes of 1996, when Labour was unexpectedly catapulted to power on the strength of nationwide disgruntlement on a wide array of domestic issues... with the only significant differences being that this was a European election, not a general one; and that the result this time round did not exactly come a surprise.

Nonetheless there is today, as there was in 1996, a palpable sense of disillusionment and uncertainty regarding the economic and political direction of the country. Dr Gonzi appeared to acknowledge as much during his press conference yesterday, when he talked about the "unpopular decisions" he has had to take in recent months. But at the same time, Gonzi also gave the impression that he has not fully taken on board the indications of yesterday's result.

While "assuming full responsibility" for his party's performance – whatever that means in practical terms – the Prime Minister strongly hinted that it will be business as usual as from tomorrow. In a series of vague and somewhat woolly answers to questions by the press, Lawrence Gonzi claimed he would be closely analysing the result, but also reminded listeners that there were still the same challenges facing the country, and that there would not be any significant change in direction by his government.

Judging by today's result, this is not what a substantial section of the PN's own voter-base wants to hear. Gonzi would be

wise to swallow a little pride and concede that he himself has so far failed to deliver on a number of crucial counts since last year's election. For instance: 15 months ago he promised to take personal ownership of a sorely-needed reform at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, and to solve the "environmental deficit" in the same way as he had previously turned around the economic deficit.

It was an unfortunate choice of analogy. Over a year later, the promised reform of MEPA has not materialised, and popular discontent at the "monster" is as rife as ever. As for the economic deficit, revised NSO statistics now reveal that government's projections have gone seriously awry, and the European Commission launched excessive deficit procedures against Malta for failing to control government expenditure.

Another electoral promise to bite the dust was the much-touted cut in income tax brackets: conveniently postponed indefinitely on the pretext of the international economic crisis – the same crisis that Finance

Minister Tonio Fenech claimed would not hit Malta as hard as elsewhere.

On all counts, the Gonzi administration continued to govern after March 2008 for all the world as though it enjoyed a comfortable and absolute majority and the luxury of five seats more than the Opposition in parliament. Evidently, it failed to take stock of the message inherent in the last election, and judging by his reaction to yesterday's result, Lawrence Gonzi appears dead-set on making the same mistake again.

Faced with all this, one question immediately springs to mind: what exactly does the electorate have to do, to get its message across to government?

maltatoday

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Registered voters 321,391 Votes cast _____ Invalid votes _____ Valid votes _____

Quota _____

COUNT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
ALLEANZA LIBERALI													
Zammit John													
ALPHA LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY													
Bezzina Emanuel (Emmy)													
ALTERNATTIVA DEMOKRATIKA													
Arqueros Ebejer Yvonne													
Cassola Arnold													
AZZJONI NAZZJONALI													
Muscat Josie													
Seychell Malcolm													
Spiteri Gingell John Fredrick													
IMPERIUM EUROPA													
Attard Ruben													
Lowell Norman													
K.U.L. EWROPA													
Jones Cecil Herbert													
LIBERTAS MALTA													
Gauci Mary													
PARTIT LABURISTA													
Abela Baldacchino Claudette													
Attard Montalto John													
Bedingfield Glenn													
Borg Stephen (Steve)													
Camilleri Maria Dolores													
Cuschieri Joseph													
Ellul Bonici Sharon													
Grech Louis													
Micallef Stafrace Kirill													
Mizzi Marlene													
Scicluna Edward													
Zammit Christian Joseph													
PARTIT NAZZJONALISTA													
Busutill Simon													
Casa David													
Cini Rudolph													
Deidun Alan													
Demicoli Edward													
Farrugia Vincent Victor													
Metsola Tedesco Triccas Roberta													
Perici Calascione Alexander													
Portelli Frank													
Portelli Marthese													
TAL-AJKLA													
Bonnici Nazareno													
Non Transferable Votes													
TOTAL													

CANDIDATES ELECTED 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

MEP
ELECTIONS 2009
– minute for minute

15:29: PN officials : “PN votes held, but abstentions hit PN hard nationwide. Party to retain two seats at the European Parliament.”

15:32: Deputy Prime Minister and PN Deputy leader Tonio Borg together with PN Secretary General Paul Borg Olivier are touring the counting hall.

15:44: AD sample shows 2.3% result in first count votes.

15:49: AD Chairperson Arnold Cassola: “The result looks very negative at this stage. It seems that we tried making a positive campaign to show what an AD MEP can do but we did not manage to convince people.”

15:52: Updated PL samples: PL 55%, PL 40%

16:04: PL bans carcades. A scroll on One TV instructs Labour supporters not to go out carcad-ing. Earlier, PL General Secretary Jason Micallef said “Nobody has the right or permission to organise celebrations” other than the ones planned for 19:00 next to the party headquarters.

16:07: Marlene Mizzi: “I would rather not comment on my result at this early stage, we’ll wait until the last lap. But I am very happy with the PL’s achievement.”

16:08: The PL showing, at an estimated 55% is the highest result achieved by a party within the socialist grouping throughout current EP elections.

16:10: The highest five piles of first preference votes at the Naxxar counting hall are as follows, in descending order: Simon Busuttill (PN), Louis Grech (PL), Edward Scicluna (PL), Joseph Cuschieri (PL), Marlene Mizzi (PL).

16:53: Norman Lowell first preference votes stacks head-to-head with Cassola.

16:55: Although AN has not yet published a clear sample of first preference votes obtained, an AN official told a Today journalist that their impression is that the result will be lower than that of 2008 general elections.

17:22: PN frontrunner Simon Busuttill told a Net journalist that indications show that out of the first five seats elected for the EP, “two will be for PN and three for PL. It is important to analyse the situation carefully,” he said. Stacks of number one votes for Busuttill are significantly higher than those of other candidates. He thanked the Maltese and Gozitan people for showing trust in him.

17:50: PN candidate Alex Perici Calascione: “My analysis is the same as that given by Deputy PM Tonio Borg. It was a clear message by the electorate towards government. However, we must not rush to analyse the result because it merits a serious scrutiny of what work must be done. There are various issues to look into.”

17:55: PN candidate Alex Perici Calascione: “Government still has four years more to complete its mandate. The political programme will have to continue but also take into account the people’s needs.”

The people don’t want a third party – AN

CHARLOT ZAHRA

AZZJONI Nazzjonali’s dismal result yesterday brought a disappointing end to the right-wing party’s campaign, firmly built on an anti-immigration platform. AN was seeing no improvement over the 0.6% they got in 2008.

AN secretary-general Wayne Hewitt was quick to admit that his party had not managed to take its status any further after last year’s result in the general elections.

“It looks disappointing, pretty much for all the small parties. I think it is unfortunate that many more people decided not to vote rather than seeing an alternative in the smaller parties,” Hewitt said.

“We have to yet to see what votes we may inherit, but we are not hopeful,” he added.

Mirroring the dismal results for all third parties, AN’s showing yesterday confirmed that the general protest vote of the 2009 European elections did not find any expression in other parties.

Hewitt expressed caution about early indications that far-rightist Norman Lowell had garnered a significant number



A lot of soul-searching to do for Josie Muscat and Azzjoni Nazzjonali

of first preference votes – a surprise showing for the political outcast.

He was equally clueless about the future of Azzjoni Nazzjonali, whose two-year career so far had not produced any result of success.

“Next week we will hold an executive meeting and take a decision in the general assem-

bly. We have to take note of this result and see what steps we will take with regards to the future of the party. We will listen to everybody’s ideas, and within two weeks we should have interpreted what these results mean to us.”

Hewitt added that it was clear that the general feeling in the country was that there was no

interest in seeing third parties break the political mould.

“The general public is still too polarized, and they feel that if they don’t vote for the big parties, then they shouldn’t bother voting for the small parties. I think the real message the people can send is by voting for third parties. I don’t think abstaining is an option.”

Norman Lowell – the dark horse of the campaign

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

NORMAN Lowell, the far right candidate contesting on the most overtly anti-immigration platform of this campaign, looks set to emerge from the race with a respectable tally surpassing the 3,000 vote count.

Considering how much was stacked against him in this election, it remains a singular achievement. Lowell contested while still serving a suspended sentence for incitement to racial hatred. Like all political outsiders, he was denied the opportunity of a half-hour interview on a private TV station – with the Broadcasting Authority insisting on the participation of both PN and PL candidates in the name of “balance” – and apart from the occasional YouTube video clip, his entire campaign expenditure appears to have been limited to a single packet of balloons.

And yet, he has overtaken rival anti-immigration party Azzjoni Nazzjonali – founded by former Nationalist MP Josie Muscat – and at the time of writing looks set to equal, if not actually surpass, Arnold Cassola of the Greens.

While not exactly unexpected, the Lowell trend was not picked up by various polls and

surveys before Saturday’s vote. MaltaToday had placed his showing as an undefined portion of the “others” – a category which also included Cecil Herbert Jones and Nazzarenu Bonnici.

As in other European countries, it seems that a substantial portion of far right sympathisers either refused to participate in polls outright, or else registered their voting intention as ‘undecided’. It is

therefore difficult to profile the typical Lowell supporter by any category other than skin colour and/or ethnicity.

Apart from genuine admirers and Imperium Europa ideologues, there will no doubt have been those who voted Norman Lowell on the strength of what he has come to represent in the collective psyche (rather than what he may have realistically achieved in the EP).

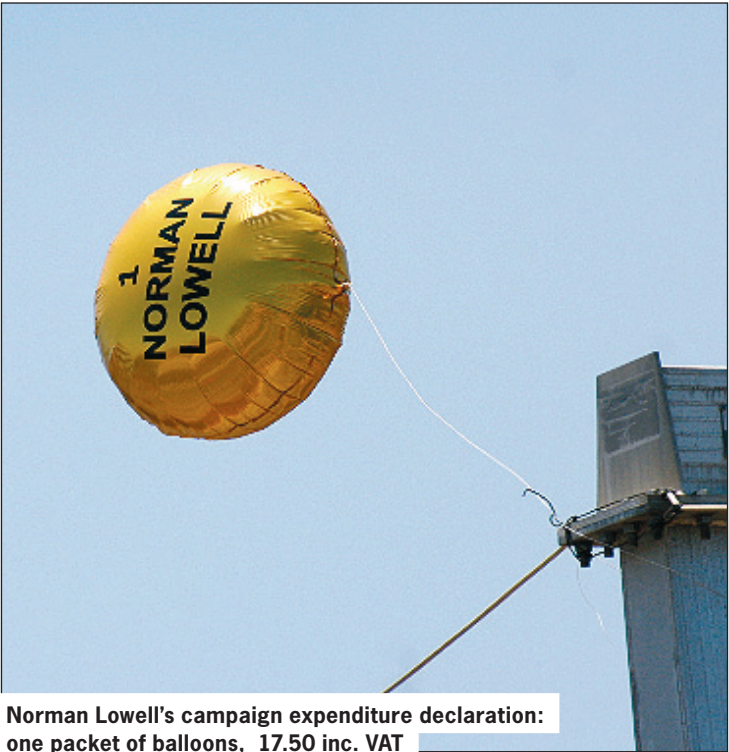
A protest vote for Norman

Lowell speaks volumes to its intended recipient, the government of Malta. Having contested squarely and exclusively on the immigration ticket, there can be no mistaking the general cause of the voter’s disgruntlement. And while none but the seriously deranged will expect Lawrence Gonzi to adopt any of Lowell’s own policy platforms – which include a full-scale blockade of Malta, and the expulsion from Europe of all citizens of African descent – the message is nonetheless clear.

A sizeable portion of Nationalist voters is dissatisfied with the government’s handling of the immigration issue. Their number remains small, but it is nonetheless large enough to swing an election. And it can only be expected to grow.

From this perspective, the only likely lesson to be taken on board by the two main parties is that the so-called “gentleman’s agreement” between Gonzi and Sant – supposedly broken by Joseph Muscat in this election – is now null and void.

With over 3,000 votes in the balance, the extreme right wing vote can no longer be ignored, as it has been in the past. And as 2013 approaches apace, we can only expect a gradual hardening of the mainstream parties’ line on immigration.



Norman Lowell’s campaign expenditure declaration: one packet of balloons, 17.50 inc. VAT

Deidun flounders, ‘Utility bills reason for PN loss’

JULIA FARRUGIA

NATIONALIST MEP candidate Alan Deidun yesterday came to terms with the PN’s crushing defeat by saying voters did not understand the European dimension of the EP elections.

According to party observations, Deidun was not registering among the top PN candidates.

“I am disappointed at the result. My thoughts are pretty much those of Tonio Borg (deputy prime

minister). Since the PN is the party that has always worked for Europe, I think it deserved to fare better in these elections,” Deidun said.

He added that the PN now had to look into the concerns expressed by the 30,000 odd voters who had given Labour their majority.

“There were many local issues, such as the increase in the utility bills and immigration. Many voters did not understand this was a European election,” Deidun said.




‘Low-key’ directive for Labour celebrations

MATTHEW VELLA


THE Labour Party yesterday heralded its victory at the polls with low-key celebrations, banning carcades and public displays of victory save for the party held outside their Hamrun headquarters.

Labour deputy leader for party affairs Toni Abela announced victory early in the afternoon yesterday, but was adamant in treating it as “just a battle”.



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Without making any overtures for his party’s victory, he said Labour had obtained a “comfortable majority” and called on party supporters to treat the triumph as “a victory, but not the victory.”

He was later seen shaking hands with deputy Prime Minister Tonio Borg and PN secretary-general Paul Borg Olivier.

Labour’s One TV also played down the extent of its celebrations by broadcasting monotonous images of the Naxxar counting hall, scored by a selection of drowsy instrumental tunes. There was no triumphalist music or pundits back-slapping each other. For a few minutes, the TV flashed images from the Labour celebrations in Hamrun.

Labour secretary-general Jason Micallef also “ordered” supporters not to celebrate by carcading around the island. One TV flashed repetitive messages that read ‘carcades are not permitted’.

Ferdinand out of Andorra game

RIO Ferdinand will not join up with the England squad ahead of Wednesday's World Cup qualifier with Andorra. The Manchester United defender was ruled out of Saturday's victory over Kazakhstan as he was still experiencing discomfort in a calf injury that disrupted his preparation for last month's Champions League final.

It was expected Ferdinand would join up with his England colleagues yesterday but the FA have now confirmed the 30-year-old will miss out again, giving himself more chance to rest to ensure his fitness for the new season. It ends an injury-blighted campaign for Ferdinand, who has also been troubled by a back complaint in recent times.

There was little point in him being risked against Andorra, who will surely not prevent Fabio Capello's side from making it seven Group Six wins on the trot at Wembley on Wednesday, leaving them tantalisingly close to booking a place at next summer's World Cup in



South Africa. Capello has opted not to bring in a replacement, leaving him with just 21 players as Gareth Barry has been ruled out of Wednesday's game through suspension. Barry was booked in Almaty on Saturday and has now been cleared to link up with his new club Manchester City.

Six out of seven for Button

JENSON Button has equalled the record of winning six of an F1 season's first seven races with victory in the Turkish Grand Prix. The Red Bull pairing of Mark Webber and pole man Sebastian Vettel finished alongside Button on the podium as Rubens Barrichello suffered from the Brawn team's first retirement.

Jenson Button continued his domination of the current Formula One season with his sixth victory in seven races to move a step closer to clinching his maiden world championship. A mistake from Brawn GP team-mate Rubens Barrichello off the line, and an error from pole-sitter Sebastian Vettel in his Red Bull on the opening lap allowed Button to cruise to the line in the Turkish Grand Prix.

It was the 29-year-old's fourth consecutive success, the first time that has been achieved by a Briton since Nigel Mansell went on to take the title in 1992.

Button now has a 26-point cushion over Barrichello at the top of the standings as the Brazilian retired on lap 49, with Vettel 32 points adrift as he finished third behind team-mate Mark Webber.

After crossing the line, Button was told over the pit-to-car radio he had produced an "awesome drive," to which he replied: "Thankyou. You've built me a monster of a car. You guys are absolute legends."

And rightly so because only five times in Formula One's 60-year history has any driver won

six out of the first seven races, notably Alberto Ascari, Juan Manuel Fangio, Jim Clark and Michael Schumacher (twice).

Button could not have asked for it to be any easier, either, thanks to Barrichello initially as he stalled from his third place on the grid, relegating him down to 13th by the end of the first lap.

As for Vettel, whose two previous victories had come from pole, the young German ran wide onto a painted kerb coming out of turn nine.

That forced him into running onto the grass approaching turn 10, which was all the invitation Button needed to take the lead, and ultimately the victory.

Not even switching Vettel to a three-stop strategy then worked for although he ran behind Button's exhaust at the midway point of the race, his failure to pass the championship leader also cost him.

It was not even good enough for the runner-up spot as Webber did enough in his stints to take the line just 0.7secs clear of the 21-year-old.

Toyota's Jarno Trulli finished fourth, followed by Nico Rosberg in his Williams, matching his best performance of the season.

Winner of this race from pole



for the last three years in Felipe Massa in his Ferrari was sixth, with BMW Sauber's Robert Kubica finally ending his points duck with seventh.

The second Toyota of Timo Glock completed the top eight, with Lewis Hamilton 13th in his pitiful McLaren, finishing 80.4 seconds adrift of runaway winner and championship leader Button.

As for the constructors', Brawn's first failure of the season means Red Bull have closed the gap by four points to 39.5.

In the build-up immediately before the race at Istanbul's Otodrom, there had been wild rumours the FOTA eight would boycott it at the end of the formation lap.

It had been suggested as a protest to their ongoing feud with the FIA over the budget cap, but as expected it failed to materialise, thankfully so for Button who marches on.

Federer makes history

ROGER Federer beat Robin Soderling in straight sets to win his first French Open and equal Pete Sampras's record of 14 Grand Slam titles.

World number two Federer becomes only the sixth man to have won each of the four Grand Slam tournaments.

The 27-year-old Swiss produced a near-faultless display in testing conditions to dominate Sweden's Soderling, a shock finalist, from start to finish.

He wrapped up a 6-1 7-6 (7-1) 6-4 victory in one hour and 55 minutes.

A tearful Federer, who was contesting a record-equalling 19th Grand Slam final, will now turn his attention to the grass-court season and Wimbledon, where he is bidding for a sixth title.

The former world number one's triumph will go some way to silencing those who claimed his career was on the slide amid the rise of world number one Rafael Nadal.

Federer was appearing in his fifth consecutive Grand Slam fi-

nal and, remarkably, his 15th in the last 16 Grand Slam tournaments.

He looked a picture of calm from the moment he set foot on Court Philippe Chatrier and, cheered on by large sections of the crowd, made a blistering start.

An understandably nervous-looking Soderling, contesting his first Grand Slam final, went wide once and long twice before double-faulting to give his opponent an effortless break of serve in game one.

Federer backed that up with a majestic service game, which he held to love with one booming ace and the most delightful sliced backhand which died as soon as it touched the red dirt.

A second break was swift in its arrival - Soderling netted a backhand to give Federer two break points and then left a forehand that landed on the baseline to fall 3-0 behind.

With Soderling's unforced error-count rising sharply, Federer eased through another service game and, while not needing to

find top gear, he was already oozing confidence.

A morale-boosting hold kept Soderling in contention at 4-1 but the Swede was showing none of the aggression that saw him defeat several top class clay-court-ers, including Nadal, en route to his first tour level outdoor final.

Another hold to love put Federer within a game of the opening set and he took it at the second time of asking by unleashing a rasping cross-court backhand to pass Soderling at the net.

With many of the ebullient spectators chanting Federer's name at the change over, it was easy to understand why Soderling had his head buried in a towel.

Federer opened the second set with a double-fault but normal service was quickly resumed and a thumping ace down the 'T' helped him take game one with little reason for concern.

Soderling's disappointing movement and shot selection meant he was only rarely likely to get the better of Federer from the base-

line, so it was fortunate for the 24-year-old that he found some rhythm on serve and was able to level at 1-1.

After Federer moved 2-1 ahead, Soderling powered his way to 2-2 by holding to love.

But the Swiss's concentration seemed to be affected at the beginning of that game when he was confronted by a spectator, who breached the security and appeared to wave a flag in Federer's face before belatedly being wrestled to the ground.

By this point the sunshine in which the match started had given way to cloudy skies, a fairly strong wind and gentle rainfall, and break-point opportunities were few and far between.

At 4-3 up, Federer cranked up the pressure and although Soderling held serve with a thunderous inside-out forehand winner, the 6ft 4in right-hander was barely given a sniff in game nine.



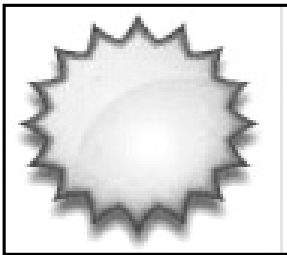
Swiss Roger Federer receives the trophy after winning against Swedish player Robin Soderling from former tennis international US Andre Agassi (right) after their French Open men's final match at Roland Garros Stadium in Paris

Soderling twice kept his composure when serving to stay in the set but Federer was in a class of his own during the tie-break.

He gained the first of three mini-breaks at 1-1 and, aided by four magnificent aces, left Soderling to chase shadows.

The third set was essentially decided in game three when Soderling double-faulted to gift Federer a break in game one.

Today's Weather



SUNNY
27 °C / 18 °C
UV INDEX: 9

WARNINGS: Nil
GENERAL SITUATION: An area of high pressure covers the central Mediterranean
WEATHER: Fine
VISIBILITY: Good
WIND: Light to moderate Northeast (force 3 to 4) becoming light (force 3)
SEA: Slight
SWELL: Low Southeast becoming negligible
SEA TEMPERATURE: 21°C

Setback for govt parties, far-right spectre haunts EP elections

ESTABLISHED parties yesterday found themselves struggling in their quest for European Parliament seats as recession-hit voters turned to protest parties or failed to cast ballots at all in elections.

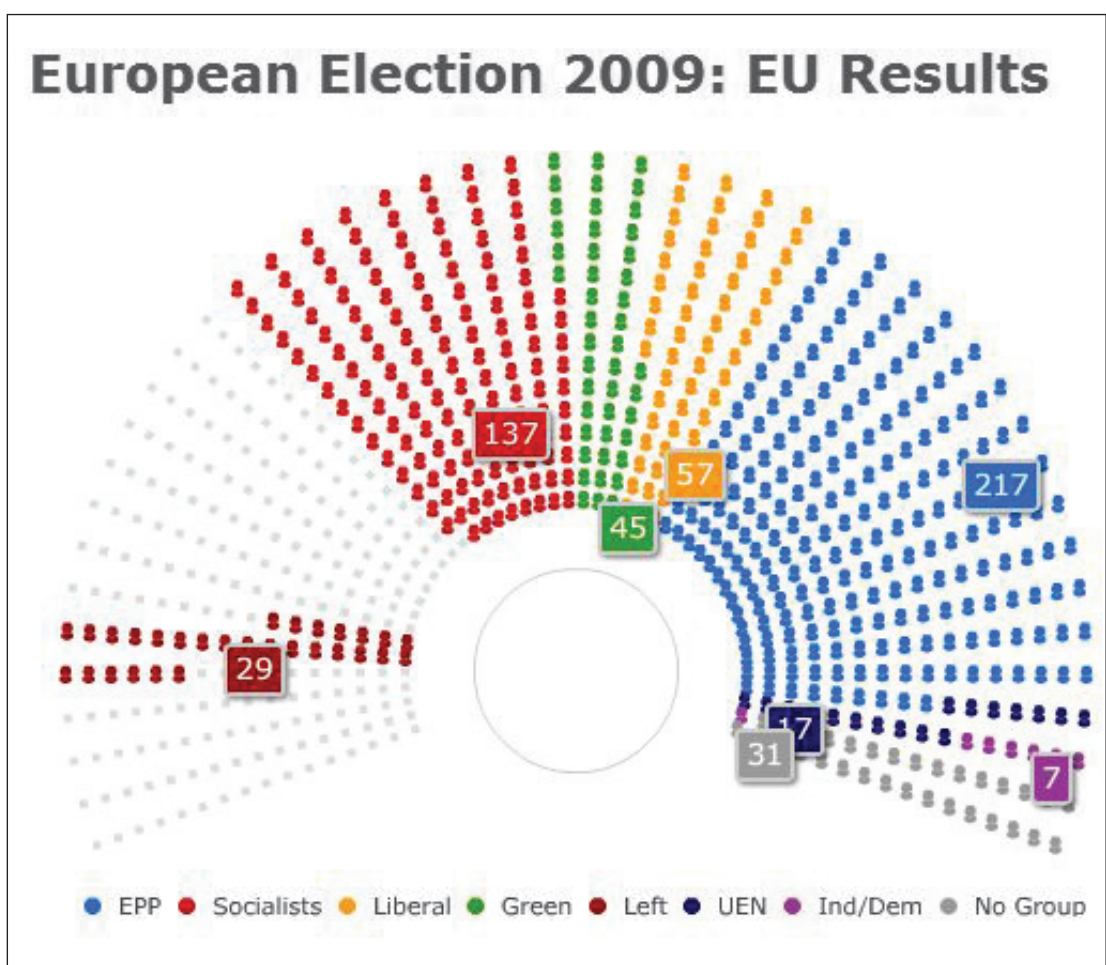
Voters in 19 European Union countries went to the polls on the fourth and final day of an election in which some 375m people in 27 states were eligible to cast ballots.

Germany's ruling Christian Democrats slipped back with the centre-right CDU-CSU alliance of Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, set to win 38% of the vote, down from 44% in 2004, according to exit polls. Her Social Democrat coalition partners were expected to achieve roughly the same result as in 2004 – 21%.

The liberal Free Democrats – Merkel's preferred government partners after next September's national election – were projected to score 10%, up from 6% in 2004.

Governments in many countries, especially the UK, where Gordon Brown, prime minister, is struggling for his political life, anticipated punishment at the hands of voters angry and frightened at Europe's worst recession since the 1930s.

"The results are going to be terrible. There's no point beating



about the bush on that," Peter Hain, Mr Brown's secretary of state for Wales, told Sky News.

"Terrible for Labour and, I suspect, terrible for all the mainstream parties."

Pollsters predicted a surge in support for the anti-EU UK Independence party, partly thanks to an expenses scandal that has shattered public trust in members of parliament.

Across Europe, evidence of anti-government protest votes appeared in Ireland, where the ruling Fianna Fáil party appeared in danger of losing its European parliament seat for the Dublin area, and in Latvia, where an opposition party representing Russian-speakers made strong gains.

In Austria, a group led by MEP Hans-Peter Martin, a journalist who campaigns against corruption in the European parliament, was set to take 18% of the vote.

Two far-right parties were on course to win a combined 17.5%. In neighbouring Slovakia, the ultra-nationalist SNS party was

poised to claim its first seat in the EU legislature.

Voters in Italy today cast their ballots against a background of unabated sexual controversy surrounding the prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. At noon, the turnout was more than 3% below the figure at the same point in the 2008 ballot. Low turnouts in Italy tend to favour the left.

It was notable that the highest levels of abstention were mostly in regions that traditionally favour the right, possibly suggesting conservative Catholic voters had registered their disapproval by staying away.

Geert Wilders' populist, anti-Islamic Party for Freedom finished second in the Netherlands and seized four of the 25 Dutch seats in the parliament.

EU policymakers were hoping that this election, the seventh to the European parliament, would reverse an unbroken trend of declining voter participation

ever since direct elections to the legislature were introduced in 1979.

First signs were that the turnout would be close to the 45.7% recorded in the 2004 elections. In France, 14.8% of voters had cast ballots by midday, up from 13.7% in 2004.

But Nicolas Sarkozy's ruling centre-right UMP tonight claimed a massive victory as early projections put the party at 28%, far ahead of the beleaguered Socialist party, whose predicted 16% marked a humiliating loss of seats in the European parliament. The other big winners of the night were the greens: the Europe Ecologie coalition, headed by the former May 1968 student leader and Europe veteran Daniel Cohn-Bendit was predicted to come third, less than 1% behind the Socialists.

In Slovakia, turnout was a wretched 19% – but it was slightly up on 17% five years ago. Malta's turnout was 79%, slightly down from 82%.

EU officials say a low turnout is disappointing because the parliament is poised under the bloc's Lisbon treaty to win even greater powers. But they console themselves with the thought that turnout in US mid-term congressional elections over the past 30 years has hovered around 40%.

The level of invective in the Hungarian campaign has been more than disturbing, with fringe neo-fascists looking for an election breakthrough and sparing no one's blushes. The top candidate for Jobbik, the neo-fascist party, scraped the barrel in the final days ahead of the vote.

"So-called proud Hungarian Jews should go back to playing with their tiny little circumcised tails," said Christina Morvay, who may well win a seat in Strasbourg and Brussels.

Apart from the focus on whether a seat is won by Jobbik, which boasts black-shirted paramilitaries and has the large Roma minority trembling with fear, the broader picture is one of government meltdown and a landslide victory for the main rightwing opposition, Fidesz.



Dutch far-right lawmaker Geert Wilders speaks to the media in his office in The Hague. Wilders is accused of making several public anti-Islamic statements.



Members of Jobbik, a Hungarian far-right party, whose black uniforms and red-and-white flashes were criticised by Jewish leaders in Europe and the US.



Voting papers for the British National Party are piled behind a counting official during the European election count at the Town Hall in Manchester

is 'falling to pieces'



those who voted for labour, and those who chose to abstain.

"Even to those who did not vote, I tell them that I will strive to make them understand that their place is also with Labour, within our brand new progressive movement," Joseph Muscat said.

He adding he was more satisfied at having seen democracy being put into practice.

"This is just the beginning,"



Labour deputy leader for parliamentary affairs waves to the crowd on the Mile End

Muscat stressed, promising that as from now, the PL will strengthen its work to consolidate the significance of this electoral success, and bring it to fruition by leading the nation towards a "brand new tomorrow".

At the beginning of his speech, Joseph Muscat saluted the memory of Labour MP Karl Chircop who passed away last year after a brief illness.



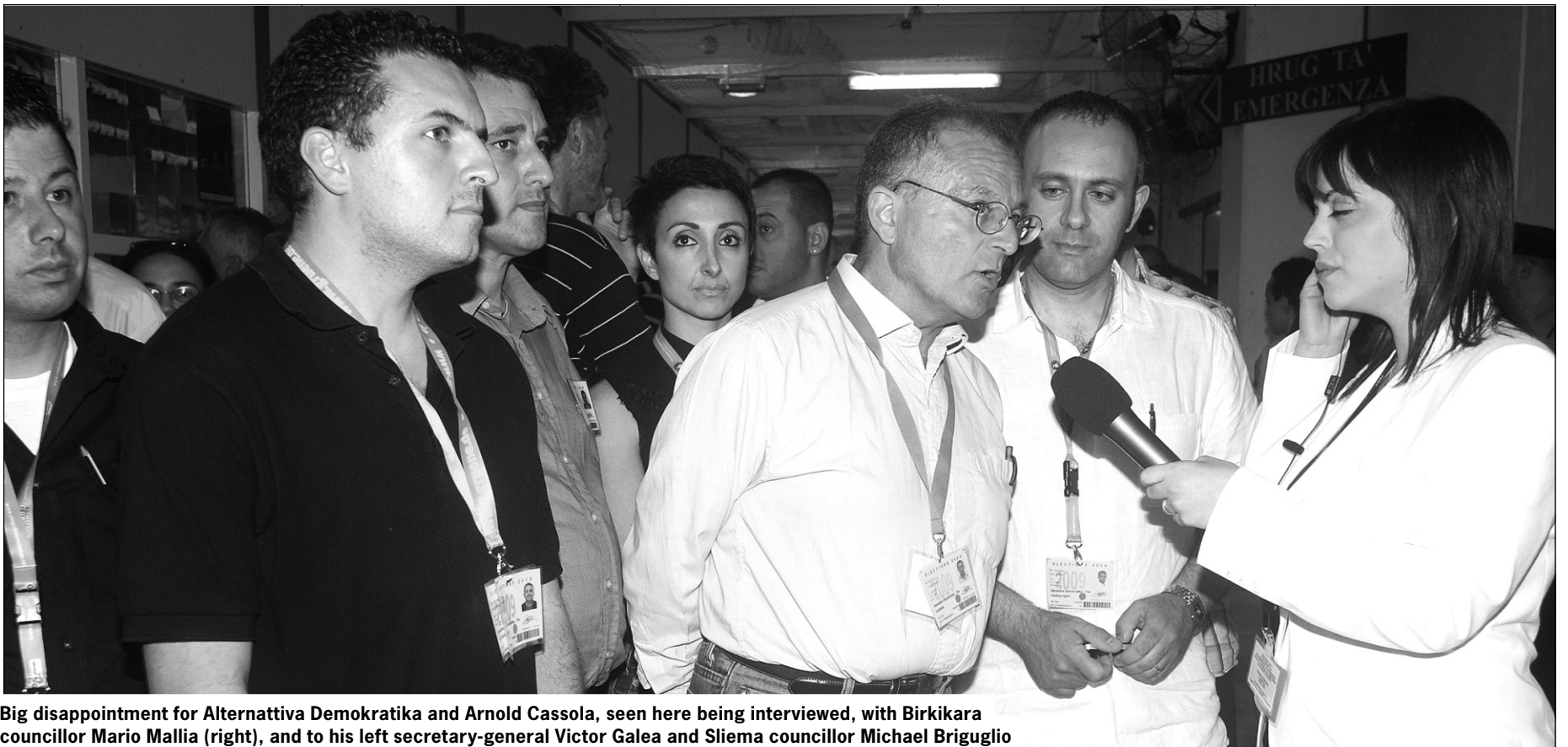
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Big disappointment for Alternattiva Demokratika and Arnold Cassola, seen here being interviewed, with Birkikara councillor Mario Mallia (right), and to his left secretary-general Victor Galea and Sliema councillor Michael Briguglio

AD secretary-general hints at 'radical decision' yet to come

DAVID DARMANIN

EVEN prior to the start of the counting process yesterday evening, a quick glimpse at the stacks of sorted ballot sheets was enough to destroy the morale of AD officials.

A first sample counted a measly 2.8% first preference votes – a notch up from the 1.3% obtained in 2008 general elections but a far cry from the staggering 9.8% result obtained in 2004 EP elections.

"The morale is low," said AD secretary-general Victor Galea at the quarters assigned to his party at the Naxxar counting hall yesterday afternoon. "The result was a shock to us because as much as we understand people who would not risk voting for a wider representation in the national parliament, we did not understand that this time round, the same fear also applied to the European Parliament."

Asked about his expectations on the party's response to this defeat, Galea said that "mem-

bers will decide on the future and the setup of the party at an annual general meeting due in November".

Probed on whether a radical change is due, Galea said: "Personally, I think more than a radical change we need to make a radical decision. The good thing is that we have enough time to reflect until November."

AD must still draw a post-mortem to put its finger on what led to this utter defeat. But Galea's analysis shows that the party's message "was either not properly delivered or it was not the type of message that is attractive to the Maltese voter."

"We propagated the idea of having a more widely represented European Parliament, as we believe it is in the national interest to have influence on more political groupings. The European Parliament is different to the national one. But regardless, the PN and PL campaign focused on obtaining an absolute majority, as is done in general elections. People responded to that feel, and in fact the votes

we obtained are very comparable to those we obtained in general elections. It is amply clear that Malta remains polarised and bi-partisan."

But surely, this alone does not justify a drop of more than three fourths of votes obtained five years ago.

"Whereas five years ago we garnered a lot of protest votes, this time around, many abstained while another part went to smaller parties," he said.

Galea said the drop in support was not related to Labour's victory five years ago, when Cassola garnered a sufficient number of Nationalist votes which however left him hanging in sixth place.

"No I don't think people who voted Cassola five years ago voted PN this time around. This is a matter of the electoral system disadvantaging smaller parties," he explained.

But what disadvantage? There was a national quota this time around – this surely makes it much easier for parties with few candidates on their list.

"Yes but we still have a block-vote culture, and that is part of the system. I have yet to see one of the bigger parties promoting the benefits of cross voting..."

But wasn't PL doing exactly that in the eleventh hour? Wasn't it encouraging its voters to give their last preferences to AD?

"No, that was an idea started off by Evarist Bartolo on Facebook but it was on a very small scale," he replied.

"Until Saturday morning, people were still asking me whether cross voting would invalidate their votes," Galea added.

"I think it is in the interest and remit of the electoral commission to educate the public on this very fact, but you know that the electoral commission is only represented by PL and PN. Mind you, I don't want to sound defensive. We realise that the decision is sovereign."

Were they confident until the first sample came out? "Yes, we were confident, especially after reading your polls," he said, referring to exit polls published in

MaltaToday yesterday indicating a 4% preference for Cassola.

"We thought our message was clear," he repeated.

But the feel was different five years ago. AD was on a high. Cassola was discussed in columns, on blogs, in the press and was favoured among many first-time voters. They were by far less present and less discussed this time around.

"Five years ago I voted AD for the first time because PN's mudslinging campaign attracted both my curiosity and my sympathy towards the party," Galea said, agreeing.

"A lot of people then had a very similar motivation to mine. This time, not only has the PN completely ignored us but it made it a point not to send its representatives to discussion programmes on TV so that the Broadcasting Authority can quote partisan imbalance and impede the broadcasting of the debate. This was part of their strategy."

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The last nail in the coffin for Alternattiva?

JAMES DEBONO

FIVE years ago, Alternattiva Demokratika appealed to voters to vote "for country, not for party" and to elect Arnold Cassola to the European Parliament.

Their mainstream platform exploited widespread sympathy from Nationalist voters for its contribution to persuade voters to accept EU membership, and Arnold Cassola was rewarded by the vote of a tenth of the electorate.

Five years later they called people to "think big and vote

Green", but AD has been rewarded by just one in every 50 voters. What has gone wrong?

It seems some people were turned off by Cassola's takeover of AD and contesting these elections after failing to get re-elected in the Italian parliament, his former seat of office when he was elected on Romano Prodi's list of Italian expats.

And while in 2004 AD was upbeat following its historical role in securing EU membership, AD was already demoralised by last year's miserable 1.3% score.

The writing was already on the wall in March 2008 when

AD's attempt to replicate its 2004 result by trying to lure in the moderate Nationalist vote, and hinting at a possible coalition vote, failed miserably.

And while in 2004 the PN tried to vanquish AD's chances by launching a frontal attack on AD using the old abortion card, this time around the PN decided to ignore AD completely.

Chinese torture proved far more an effective strategy for the PN than a frontal attack that would have ultimately made the greens more visible and even a viable option for disgruntled voters.

But a more fundamental reason for yesterday's failure could be that on many issues, AD found itself running with hares while chasing with the hounds. Arnold Cassola was rational and moderate in all the debates, but still he failed to leave an impression on the popular imagination.

Undecided on whether to appeal for the moderate or the radical vote, on civil liberties AD did not come across as any more progressive than Labour, which this time appealed directly to the gay vote.

Ironically by being the only

party to take a principled, albeit moderate, stand on immigration, AD – unlike Labour – was definitely not in synch with the popular mood. And the fact that AD ended up running neck to neck with Norman Lowell for third place makes defeat a bitter pill to swallow.

AD's miserable showing in these elections raises the question on whether the 20-year-old party has a future. If AD fails to elect any councillor in next week's election, the party seems destined to extinction.

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