

Does the Institutional Context Matter for Candidate Selection? Some Evidence from Slovenia

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Abstract: In the article we test certain political scientists' findings about the influence of various institutional contexts on different candidate-selection arrangements for elections, using the case of Slovenia. Specifically, we examine the 2004 elections to both the national parliament and the European Parliament (EP), where different electoral systems were used. According to different political scientists, candidate selection for EP elections should be more decentralised. We also expected to reveal a higher level of democracy in the processes applied in Slovenian parliamentary parties for the EP elections than in those used for national parliamentary elections. An analysis of formal documents indicates only minor trends (in some parties) of greater centralisation and a lower level of democracy in candidate selection for EP elections compared to elections to the national parliament. Interviews with representatives from parties' selectors revealed a slightly different picture; some changes in all parties and somewhat bigger changes as well. Larger differences in the selection of candidates for both elections were only discovered in terms of the criteria the selectors employed. Nevertheless, it is hard to speak about the strong impact of different institutional contexts on the aforementioned aspects of candidate selection.

Keywords: candidate selection, (de)centralisation, internal democracy, European Parliamentary elections, national election, Slovenia

1. Introduction

Candidate selection is a process with important consequences for parties, voters, as well as legislatures (Gallagher 1988; Erickson, Carty 1991). Usually the selection of candidates is closely associated with political parties and has attracted significant attention from scholars who have exposed its importance from different angles. Katz (2001: 277) points to candidate selection as being one of the central defining functions of a political party in a democracy. On the other hand, at the beginning of the 20th century Ostrogorski (in Norris 1997: 7) had

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already connected candidate selection with the distribution of power within parties – such distribution is highly affected by candidate selection. Some decades ago Schattschneider (in Gallagher 1988) made one of the best-known observations on candidate selection: The nature of candidate selection determines the nature of the party – whoever can make decisions on candidate selection is the owner of the party. Consequently, candidate selection may be the most suitable point for observing the distribution of power within parties (Ranney 1968). Candidate selection has been heavily connected with internal party democracy since the times of Michels' pioneering researches (Linz 2002). Since candidate selection has been important for different actors involved in political life, it has frequently been connected with internal party conflict, which can lead to various consequences (Katz 2001).

From the voters' point of view, candidate selection is important since it reduces the alternatives available to them – voters can make a choice only among those candidates who survive the parties' candidate selection processes. As pointed out by Pesonen (in Gallagher 1988: 2), the candidate-selection stage eliminates 99.96% of eligible people so the voters only choose from 0.04% of the candidates.

Candidate selection also heavily determines the functioning of parliaments and the representational character of such bodies. Several scholars (for example Gallagher 1988; Erickson, Carty 1991; Norris 1997; Hazan 2002) believe candidate election determines the quality of elected MPs and consequently also the functioning of parliaments – candidate selection is connected with the (non)professionalism of MPs, (non)professionalism of parliaments, and the level of cohesion of parliamentary party groups.

Studying candidate selection is most often focused on the process itself, more precisely on the distribution of power within the process (from the viewpoint of (de)centralisation and internal democracy or the level of involvement of (primarily) party members in the process), and to a smaller extent the criteria employed by selectors during candidate selection are also investigated.

In the article we shall concentrate our attention on several of the most frequent aspects of candidate selection in Slovenia. We want to find out whether it is possible to observe different levels of (de)centralisation and internal democracy or levels of involvement of party members in candidate selection. In addition, the criteria employed by selectors in candidate selection will also be investigated. We decided to limit our analysis to two elections held in 2004, namely the European Parliamentary elections (June 2004) and the national Parliamentary elections (October 2004).

Our research interest is determined by the question of whether Slovenian parties used different types of candidate selection for these two elections. We would expect a different candidate selection process for at least two reasons: 1) we expect parties to have adapted to the different institutional contexts (especially adaptation to a partly different electoral system and to an environment which can reveal the demand for different characteristics of candidates); and 2) in the last decade a tendency towards the democratisation of candidate selection for national parliamentary elections can be observed in Western European parties (Bille 2001; Katz 2001; Scarrow et al. 2002). While European Parliamentary elections are often described as second-order elections (Reif, Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2004) suitable for allowing parties to experiment with new solutions (alternatives) which can be later transferred to their functioning within the national context. Since candidate selection for national parliamentary elections within Slovenian parties can hardly be described as achieving higher levels of internal democracy, we would

expect that the parties will, given the described tendency, be willing to use European Parliamentary elections to experiment with higher levels of democratisation of candidate selection.

2. The Importance of Institutional Context for Candidate Selection

Since they are supposed to exert an important influence on the performance of other actors (March, Olsen 1984; John 1998), institutions (in particular their description and formal procedure within them) had already attracted special attention in political science by the first half of the 20th century. Institutionalism had been a very popular and influential theoretical approach in the first half of the 20th century, but later it became heavily criticised. Consequently, other theoretical approaches have received more attention. Interest in the role and explanatory power of institutions grew in the 1980s and a neoinstitutionalist approach developed. Within political science¹, neoinstitutionalism has been associated with March and Olsen (1984).² Research interest in neoinstitutionalism has been redirected from the mere description of institutions and investigation of the formal procedures within them, towards a broader understanding of the institutions in their environments, a recognition of the importance of values and informal relations (Fink-Hafner 2002), as well as the importance of institutions in determining decision-making within other actors (Rosamond in Lajh 2005). Actors in such circumstances usually behave in an instrumental way and adapt their behaviour toward the institutions with the aim of achieving the maximum implementation of their preferences (Hall, Taylor 1996). Put in another way, actors make strategic calculations of the costs and benefits in the case of certain activities.

Within the literature, the importance of institutions and institutional context in the case of political parties and candidate selection is most frequently associated with the (non)existence of legal provisions which determine candidate selection as well as the type and elements of the electoral system (Gallagher 1988; Lundell 2004).

As found by Gallagher (1988), Norris (1996), Krouwel (1999) and Hazan (2002), candidate selection is very rarely regulated by laws. Usually laws only determine who can be a potential candidate and whether some additional conditions have to be fulfilled (for example, a deposit, whether there must be a certain number of signatures etc.). In such circumstances, the institutional context cannot exert a larger influence over candidate selection in all parties in a particular country. Since candidate selection is largely in the hands of individual parties within the same country, the process can vary from party to party substantially.³

On the other hand, questions frequently arise in the literature regarding the influence of the type of electoral system and particular elements of electoral systems on candidate selection. Electoral systems represent part of the institutional context for all parties in a particular country. The main question is whether the type of electoral system and particular elements of electoral systems are an important determinant which can exert an influence on candidate selection in all parties (irrespective of other differences among parties, especially as regards ideology, size, age and model of development), particularly in the sense of levels of (de)centralisation and internal democracy. Epstein (in Gallagher 1988) thought that the type of electoral system has an influence on the level of (de)centralisation of candidate selection; proportional electoral systems are supposed to tend towards a greater level of centralisation because of the high district magnitude. In contrast, Duverger (in Gallagher 1988: 9) suggested that the impact of

an electoral system on the degree of centralisation of candidate selection is highly uncertain. Nevertheless, he admitted a connection between the existence of party lists and a high district magnitude and the greater influence of the “party” in candidate selection.

But the type of electoral system is not the only possible determinant of candidate selection. Quite often two elements of electoral systems with a potential influence on the level of (de)centralisation of candidate selection are mentioned, namely the possibility of preference voting and district magnitude (Gallagher 1988; Norris 1997; Lundell 2004). If there is the possibility of preferential voting, there is a tendency towards a higher level of decentralisation (Gallagher 1988; Norris 1997; Lundell 2004), while a higher district magnitude is supposed to result in a higher level of centralisation in candidate selection (Lundell 2004).

3. Pressures for the Democratisation of Candidate Selection

We previously considered the question of the level of (de)centralisation in candidate selection. It should be noted that in this case (de)centralisation is, as a rule, associated with territorial (de)centralisation.⁴ We find a high level of decentralisation when local party organisations play a very important role in candidate selection, while a high level of centralisation in candidate selection is associated with a very important role for central party offices. In other words, the lower down in the party hierarchy the decision on candidate selection is made, the more decentralised the candidate selection is (Bille 2001: 367).

On the other hand, when it comes to the level of democracy we are primarily interested in the level of involvement of party members in candidate selection. Some scholars speak about a high level of democracy when territorial party organisations or their bodies play an important role in candidate selection. Krouwel (1999), Bille (2001) and Lundell (2004) warn that in this case we can speak about a high level of decentralisation but are simultaneously faced with a low level of democracy. In other words, in such a case the decision on candidate selection is made by a local oligarchy instead of a national oligarchy (Rahat, Hazan 2001).

Rahat and Hazan (2001) see the American primaries as an example of the great inclusiveness of party members (or sympathisers) or a high level of democracy in candidate selection.⁵ Hopkin (2001) adds that such a level of democracy in candidate selection in Western Europe is still an exception to the rule.⁶

When speaking of levels of democracy in candidate selection it is necessary to mention the debates and orientations present in the interested public as well as in parties in Western European countries during the last decade. A lot of attention has been paid to the so-called democratisation of candidate selection. In this sense, democratisation is associated with greater inclusiveness of people (mostly party members) in candidate selection than in the past (Rahat, Hazan 2001).⁷ In general, in Western European countries we can indeed speak of the democratisation of candidate selection, which is reflected primarily in the introduction of a membership ballot and the extension of rights to party members in candidate selection (Bille 2001; Scarrow et al. 2002).⁸ But the same authors also identified some opposite developments – they identified other examples where parties reduced the level of democracy or rights of party members in candidate selection. However, they emphasised this development has been less widespread than the introduction of a membership ballot.

There are also several potential answers why a tendency towards the democratisation of candidate selection has occurred. In a way, the democratisation of candidate selection is seen as a necessary step towards the democratisation of parties – democracy in parties has an important impact on the nature and functioning of a democratic regime in an individual country (Bille 2001). It is hard to imagine how a regime can be classified as democratic if the parties have an organisational structure that leaves no room for citizens to participate and have influence (Bille 2001: 364).

On the other hand, Pennings and Hazan (2001: 268) found that modern representative democracies are encountering a weakening of the relationship between parties and voters. During the last few decades parties have faced shrinking membership, the erosion of the once-stable social basis, an increasing number of floating voters, a rise in electoral volatility, the growing importance of electronic media at the expense of party-controlled or at least party-loyal press. It seems that the democratisation of candidate selection has been identified as a cure for the weaknesses and problems parties faced (Linz 2002), or has arisen as parties respond to stronger internal and external pressures to introduce participatory democracy more widely (Scarrow et al. 2002).

Katz (2001) has connected the introduction of the democratisation of candidate selection with the development of cartel parties, and especially with one characteristic of cartel parties – tendencies toward a higher level of leader autonomy. According to him, the democratisation of candidate selection in cartel parties has granted more power to individual members at the expense of the middle-level party elite. It is important to note that parties' leaders as a rule implement their will and wishes much more easily against individual, unorganised members than against organised party activists or the middle-level party elite. According to Katz (2001), in this instance the democratisation of candidate selection is exploited to achieve greater independence of party leaders against the middle-level party elite. Of course, we have to stress that greater participation of members in decision-making within parties is mainly perceived as a positive change by the public as well as in the parties themselves. Consequently, party leaders can label such developments an important act leading towards higher levels of internal democracy and more powerful individual members, while in reality the leaders have assured themselves the continuation of their influence and power. In the case of the effective weakening of a traditionally strong middle-level party elite, leaders have created for themselves even greater influence on candidate selection (Katz 2001; Scarrow et al. 2002). Party leaders within democratised candidate selection can assure their influence in two ways: a) leaders select several candidates and it is only from these that members can choose or make decisions on. By using this mechanism leaders effectively restrain the possibility of choice; and b) leaders make the final decision on candidate selection – they retain their influence by reserving for themselves final ratification of candidates selected on membership ballots, which means they in fact wield veto power (Katz 2001; Scarrow et al. 2002). Here we can actually only speak about some forms of membership ballots.

Despite these “side-effects” of the democratisation of candidate selection, members and voters are nevertheless usually still more likely to evaluate membership ballots as a positive development and an attractive innovation. But Linz (2002) warns there can be additional “side-effects” of membership ballots for parties. Rahat and Hazan (2001: 312) shed light on several broader consequences of introducing membership ballots based on the experiences of

several Israeli parties (the peak of membership ballots in Israeli parties was in 1996). These include changes in the bases of both the legitimacy and responsibility of selected candidates; a drastic weakening of party discipline and cohesiveness leading to a decline in the ability of parties to function as a stable basis for the political process and to operate effectively in the parliamentary arena. They also warn that the uncontrolled democratisation of candidate selection could pose a danger to the stability of both parties and governing coalitions, and thus to the stability of a parliamentary democracy in general (Rahat, Hazan 2001: 313). After almost universal implementation of membership ballots, by the end of the 20th century Israeli parties had already abolished or limited their membership ballots.

4. The Importance of Elections and their “Suitability” for Party Experiments

If we take into account the aforementioned findings of different scholars about the general tendency of (modestly) democratising candidate selection, we may then ask whether some elections (and their characteristics) are more convenient than others for allowing parties to experiment with new solutions (alternatives) which could later be transferred and applied to the common functioning of parties. Based on research on European Parliamentary elections, Reif and Schmitt (1980) formed a thesis concerning at least two types of elections, according to their importance for both parties and voters.

One type of elections is generally perceived, from the viewpoint of parties and voters, as (very) important; these are first-order elections. Results from these elections determine who will hold power and what kind of public policies will be formed and implemented. Each political system has its own first-order election. But some countries additionally have another type of election. The other, and at the same time broader, type of election Reif and Schmitt (1980) called second-order elections. Such elections are perceived to be less important since there is less at stake compared to first-order elections. Examples of second-order elections are sub-national elections, partial (mid-term) elections as well as elections to the European Parliament. For all EU member countries, elections to the European Parliament are second-order national elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2004). Since there is less at stake in second-order elections, they are supposed to be a convenient opportunity for parties and voters to search for and experiment with new solutions and alternatives which can later be transferred to the functioning of parties within the context of first-order elections.

All of the above is the basis for our expectation that the (institutional) context of European Parliamentary elections as second-order elections will create an appropriate testing ground for evaluating the democratisation of candidate selection.

5. Criteria Employed by Selectors When Choosing Candidates

As pointed out by Gallagher (1988), another important aspect of candidate selection is the question of criteria employed by selectors in the process. It is possible to identify two groups of criteria; criteria based on objective personal characteristics (for example, age, gender, social status etc.), and subjective personal characteristics (for example, political experience,

expertise in communication and organisation, etc...) of the aspirants for candidacy (Seligman in Gallagher 1988). In elections, parties above all seek electoral success either because they want to acquire ministerial positions or to implement certain public policies (Strøm, Müller 1999). The selection of a candidate with particular characteristics can help them achieve their set of aims or distance parties from them (Roberts 1999). With candidate selection, parties can exclusively emphasise the objective or subjective characteristics of aspirants, or it is also possible to employ both types of characteristics. Selectors frequently try to maximise their parties' advantage in a particular context – to win as many votes as possible they employ whatever criteria are relevant to promote the candidate with the greatest electoral appeal in a certain institutional context, no matter whether these are objective or subjective personal characteristics (Gallagher 1988). This means that party selectors are willing to adjust the criteria to the characteristics of a certain institutional context in different kinds of elections or change them in the same kind of elections over time. For parties, the institutional context of European Parliamentary elections clearly represents at least a partly new or different institutional context than that established on the national level.

When we conduct research into candidate selection, the question of level of institutionalisation of rules/criteria in candidate selection appears (Norris 1997). Candidate selection can (in all or just in particular aspects) be formally defined, or it can be informal. In formal systems candidate selection is characterised by detailed, explicit and standardised rules/criteria which are relatively clear to outside observers⁹, whereas informal candidate selection is less bureaucratic and rarely made explicit (Norris in Lundell 2004: 29). As Bille (2001) found, candidate selection in Western European parties is, as a rule, defined by the internal rules of a party. If candidate selection is indeed mostly defined by internal party rules, we could expect that such candidate selection would be less stable than those defined by laws (Rahat, Hazan 2001). Yet an astonishingly high relative degree of stability in the formal internal rules regulating candidate selection in Western European parties is revealed (Bille 2001: 367).

6. The Institutional Contexts of the European and National Parliamentary Elections in 2004

Despite Slovenian legislation determining candidate selection in all parties only to a minimal extent, the electoral system and its elements are determined for all parties equally. Nevertheless, in fact parliamentary parties create an electoral system and its elements by implementing their decision-making role in the national parliament. On the other hand, Slovenian parties are not completely free in the formation of the electoral system and its elements for European Parliamentary elections. The EU eventually succeeded in determining some important elements of the electoral system that must be respected in all EU member countries. According to the EU's rules, the electoral system in all its member states must be proportional in nature, although individual countries can decide whether they will create a proportional electoral system with party lists, or a single transferable vote. They can also decide other elements of the electoral system, but for example, the threshold can only be up to 5% (Fink-Hafner, Brinar 2004).

Several EU member countries have created at least partly different electoral systems for European Parliamentary and national parliament elections, for example: proportional versus

majority electoral systems; different numbers of electoral districts; different district magnitudes, the introduction of preferential voting, etc... (Blomgren 1999). In such cases, the need to compare candidate selection for European and national parliamentary elections is almost self-evident. A comparison between candidate selections for first-order and second-order elections can reveal whether it is possible to link different institutional contexts with different candidate selections – in terms of the level of (de)centralisation and the criteria employed by selectors. European Parliamentary elections are second-order elections, and as such are suitable for various parties to experiment with new alternatives (Hix, Marsh 2005). Consequently, we would expect some experiments leading towards the democratisation of candidate selection, especially since such a (modest) tendency is evident in several cases of national parliamentary elections.

In Slovenia in 2004, both European (in June) and national (in October) parliamentary elections were held. We seek to find out in the Slovenian case whether one can observe the influence of a different institutional context on candidate selection. More precisely, we want to discover whether it is possible to find different levels of (de)centralisation, internal democracy or different criteria employed by selectors when making candidate selections for European Parliamentary (EP) elections and national parliamentary elections.

We can reveal some differences in the institutional context of both elections – differences in elements of the electoral system which can, according to the findings of certain scholars, have an influence on selected aspects of candidate selection.

Table 1: Selected Elements of Electoral Systems for EP and National Parliamentary Elections in 2004

	European Parliament	National Parliament
Number of M(E)Ps elected	7	88
Number of constituencies	1	8
Electoral system	proportional	proportional with elements of a majority system ¹⁰
Structure of voting	party list	individual candidate
Threshold	no ¹¹	4%
Preferential voting	yes	no
Gender quota	yes	no
Distribution of mandates	d'Hondt system	Droop and D'Hondt system
District magnitude	7	11

7. Selected Evidence of the (non)Importance of the Institutional Context in Slovenia

7.1 The (de)Centralisation of Candidate Selection

Aiming to reveal the level of (de)centralisation of candidate selection, in the first stage we analysed parliamentary parties' formal documents referring to candidate selection. In Table 2 we systematically present our findings.

Table 2: Candidate Selection for EP and National Parliament Elections in 2004

	Elections to the european parliament								Elections to the national parliament							
	LDS	SDS	SD	NSi	SLS	SNS	SMS	DeSUS	LDS	SDS	SD	NSi	SLS	SNS	SMS	DeSUS
	Who determined formal rules of candidate selection ?								Who determined formal rules of candidate selection?							
Council	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Presidency			X			X				X				X		
	Who could propose candidates?								Who could propose candidates?							
Individual members			X				X			X	X				X	
Territorial organisations	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Interest organisations/sections	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X				X	
Parliamentary party group	X								X						X	
Party bodies [#]	X	X	X	X ^{**}			X		X	X	X	X ^{**}			X	
Executive committee					X								X			
Expert committee/forum	X	X					X		X	X						
MPs						X								X		
President						X								X		
Assembly of members						X								X		
Council						X								X		
Members of council	X								X							
	Who made a decision/created a proposition?								Who made a decision/created a proposition?							
Executive Council	X	X			X		X		X	X			X		X	
Presidency			X					X ^{***}			X					X ^{***}
President				X		X					X		X			
	Who made the final confirmation of lists?								Who made the final confirmation of lists?							
Presidency						X								X		
Convention										X						
Council	X	X			X		X	X ^{****}	X	X			X ^{**}		X	
(electoral) conference			X													X
Executive committee				X								X				

[#] Party bodies in the LDS are: congress, conference, council, executive committee, president, vice-presidents, general secretary, supervisory committee, commission for questions over statutes and complaints, co-ordination of local organisations, committees and forums;

Party bodies in the SDS are: congress, council, executive committee, president, council of experts, supervisory committee, parliamentary party group;

Party bodies in the SD are: congress, conference, presidency, president, vice-president, general secretary, supervisory committee;

Party bodies in the NSi are: congress, council, conference, executive committee, president, supervisory committee, party court of arbitration, regional organisation, municipal organisation, city organisation;

Party bodies in the SMS are: congress, council, executive committee, president, supervisory committee, party court of arbitration

[^] When such a decision is determined by the council with a decree.

^{**} Party members can propose individual candidates to a party's bodies.

^{***} The council decides on the list of candidates by votes at an electoral convention.

^{****} Confirmed by the council after a previous discussion in the executive committee.

^{*****} The electoral convention is composed of the council of a party.

The formal document analyses (party statutes and special regulations of parties) reveal that in fact the parties defined candidate selection identically for both elections. Regulations for candidate selection were created and defined by the same bodies within the parties. On the other hand, also the actors who could propose candidates and the bodies which made the final decision in the process were the same. Only in two parties, namely the SD and DeSUS, can we see a small tendency towards the greater centralisation of candidate selection for EP elections compared to the national parliamentary elections. Generally, the process of candidate selection in SD was the same in both cases, only in the last stage can we observe a change; a small deviation is seen in the stage of candidate confirmation. For the EP elections, candidates were confirmed by the party's conference, which included 103 members: MPs, members of the presidency, representatives of interest organisations, and representatives of regional party organisations. For the national parliamentary elections the candidates were confirmed by a convention of the party consisting of 264 representatives of regional organisations. In the SD we see greater centralisation of candidate selection for EP elections, mainly because territorial organisations were included in the confirmation of a candidate to a lesser extent, and the body was not exclusively constituted by representatives of territorial organisations as was the case with the national parliamentary elections. The same tendency is observed for the DeSUS. The list of candidates for EP elections was confirmed by the party's council, whereas the list of candidates for parliamentary elections was confirmed by the party's electoral conference.

Formally defined and *de facto* processes, as well as relations within parties, are usually not identical and some differences between the *de iure* and *de facto* defined processes typically exist (von Biezen 1998). For this reason we decided to conduct interviews with the representatives of parties' selectors. The interviews revealed at least partly a different picture than that emerging from the analyses of the formal documents. We found that candidate selection for the EP elections was in fact generally more centralised than candidate selection for the national parliamentary elections. Although candidates could be formally proposed in the case of both elections by the same party actors, the interviews revealed that with the EP elections both representatives of territorial organisations and the central bodies of parties unitary discovered that for EP elections it was important to have candidates who are recognised nationwide and consequently proposed by the central party body. In contrast to the national parliamentary elections, the proposals of territorial organisations were indeed not welcomed. When we analysed the final form of candidate lists, it was only possible to find a few candidates who had been proposed by the territorial organisations. As the main reason for the greater centralisation of candidate selection for the EP than for the national parliamentary elections the fact that this involved the first EP elections in Slovenia was exposed. There is another reason why parties were in reality faced with greater centralisation in the case of the EP than the national parliamentary elections – the selectors were trying to propose a regionally balanced list. This aim was a direct consequence of the different institutional contexts of the two elections, namely the creation of just one constituency in the case of the EP elections. Such an influence of just one constituency is no exception. In such circumstances candidates represent the whole party, not mainly or exclusively the territorial organisations, and in such a context greater centralisation is common (Erickson, Carty 1991). Since in the Slovenian case the district magnitude was bigger for the national parliamentary elections than for the EP elections, according to the find-

ings of some scholars we could expect higher centralisation in the case of the national parliamentary elections. But it seems that in these circumstances the number of constituencies was a more influential factor than district magnitude for determining the level of (de)centralisation of candidate selection.

According to some scholars, another important difference in the institutional context of the two elections was the possibility of preferential voting in the EP elections. Party representatives could not detect any influence of this factor on different levels of the (de)centralisation of candidate selection for the EP and national parliamentary elections. They simply described the introduction of preferential voting for the EP elections as a welcome novelty in the sense of greater influence of voters on the decision of who would actually win a seat. The analysis of the results of the EP elections showed that the only candidate who won a seat solely due to a large share of preference votes was Borut Pahor.¹² Additionally, in the Slovenian case we have to ignore the findings of Hix and Marsh (2005) that the introduction of preferential voting leads to competition between candidates in the same party. Party representatives did not perceive any rivalry between candidates within their own parties. They stressed that the candidates in their parties acted as a team and all wanted to contribute to their parties' success even if it was clear that only a maximum of two candidates from a single party could actually win seats. According to the answers given by party representatives we cannot say the *de facto* centralisation of candidate selection in the case of EP elections in comparison with the national parliamentary elections was determined by introducing the possibility of preferential voting.

7.2 Level of Democracy in Candidate Selection

Some analyses of candidate selection for the national parliamentary elections show that in the case of Slovenian parties we can hardly speak about higher levels of democracy in the process (Krašovec 2006). One reason why some might expect a tendency towards the democratisation of candidate selection is the already mentioned pressure on the democratisation of candidate selection in Western European parties. In addition, the EP elections in Slovenia were also characterised as second-order elections (Krašovec et al. 2005).¹³ In these circumstances one might expect some experimentation leading towards the introduction of a higher level of democracy in candidate selection for the EP than was detected for national parliamentary elections.

After conducting analyses of the formal party documents (see Table 2) we can say that candidate selection in 2004 was also in the almost exclusive competence of party elites, mostly those at the national level. Further, in terms of the level of democracy, candidate selection was actually the same for both elections. Only in the two previously mentioned parties (SD and DeSUS) could we find small differences in the candidate selection regulations – in both parties the candidate list was confirmed by smaller (in terms of numbers of members) organisations for the EP than for the national parliamentary elections. We may conclude that a weak tendency towards an even lower level of internal democracy in candidate selection was seen in these two parties.

The interviews conducted with the representatives of the selectors revealed that despite actors who could propose candidates being formally defined rather narrowly, in reality each

party member or group of party members in the cases of the two elections could propose a candidate. Yet perhaps what is more important is the question of whose proposals were actually considered. In this aspect of candidate selection it was revealed that the central bodies of parties felt obliged to control candidate selection for the EP to a greater extent than for the national parliamentary elections at all stages, even though the central bodies on the national level had their final say formally assured.

We can say that the different institutional contexts and differences in the importance of the EP and national parliamentary elections did not actually cause substantial changes in candidate selections in terms of the level of internal democracy.

7.3 Criteria Employed in Candidate Selection

In this section we are interested in finding out whether the candidate selection criteria in the investigated Slovenian parties are formally defined and what kinds of criteria predominated. Regarding the analyses of formal documents (statutes, special regulations, circular letters, other documents) we see that the criteria for candidate selection were rarely formally defined, especially not in detail. In the highest internal party statutes, criteria for candidate selection are only defined by the SDS, and even here they were very general in character. These general criteria are also used in all elections (local, parliamentary and EP elections).

The criteria employed by selectors in making a candidate selection are only formally defined in special regulations by the SLS. But it is interesting that some parties (SD, SMS, NSi) defined the criteria for candidate selection in other special regulations and only for the EP elections – they do not define criteria for national parliamentary elections. Representatives of party selectors explained that the EP elections were something special because they were being conducted for the first time and accordingly they felt an obligation to address some formal (new) criteria. According to them, the criteria for the national parliamentary elections were not defined since national parliament elections have a longer tradition and some informal criteria have already been generally accepted.

In other political parties (LDS, DeSUS and SNS) the representatives of the selectors explained why they did not formally define the criteria for candidate selection. In their opinion, the parties are both in principle and reality organisations of like-minded people and thus a formal determination of the profile of the best candidate is in this respect unnecessary.

At this point we can say the level of institutionalisation of the criteria employed in candidate selection was generally low, despite some differences among the investigated parties. A second observation is that in some parties the candidate selection criteria for the EP elections were more institutionalised than for the national parliamentary elections. On the basis of our analysis we may agree with Krašovec and Fink-Hafner (2004: 75) that the available data on the formally defined criteria for candidate selection in Slovenian parties do not allow an opportunity for more detailed analyses. One important reason for this is the minimal legal provisions determining candidate selection in all Slovenian parties and that the parties are consequently trying to avoid any transparent definition of the criteria employed when making a candidate selection.

In Table 3 we schematically present the (non)existence of formally defined criteria in Slovenian parties.

Table 3: The (Non)Existence of Formally Defined Criteria in Slovenian Parties

Political party	LDS		DeSUS		SD		SMS		SDS		SLS		NSi		SNS	
	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP
Document/ elections																
STATUTE									X	X						
SPECIAL REGULATIONS									X	X	X	X				
OTHER DOCUMENTS						X										
CIRCULAR LETTERS								X						X		

DZ – national parliamentary elections; EP – European Parliament elections

We will now turn our attention to the types of criteria employed in candidate selection.

The first finding is that even where the criteria were formally defined they were defined only very generally. Accordingly, there were no differences among the criteria employed in candidate selection for the EP and national parliamentary elections. These broad formal criteria were most often: eligibility, evidence of party membership, and reputation.

Since the analyses of formal documents could not reveal a more precise picture of the criteria employed by selectors, we conducted interviews with the representatives of selectors. The data in Table 4 show the extent of the existence of informal criteria employed in making candidate selections for the EP and national parliamentary elections as well as their main characteristics. Since many similar criteria were highlighted under different names we classified them in broader clusters of personal characteristics.

Table 4: Informal criteria employed by selectors in candidate selection

Party	LDS		DeSUS		SD		SMS		SDS		SLS		NSi		SNS	
	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP	DZ	EP
Criteria/Elections																
ELIGIBILITY	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
LOCAL RECOGNITION	2		2		2		3		2		4		4		4	
NATIONAL RECOGNITION		2		2		2		3		2		2		4		5
PARTY LOYALTY											2	4	3	2		
PARTY EXPERIENCE							4		3		3		2	3		
DEFEND PARTY'S PROGRAMME			4	3			2	2	5	5					3	3
ACTIVITY IN CAMPAIGN			3	4	5	6										
REPUTATION, ABILITY	3	3			3	3			4						2	2
PUBLIC OFFICE EXPERIENCE	4		5		4											
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE		4				4		5		3		5		5		4
LANGUAGE SKILLS						5	6			4		6				6
PERSONALITY		5									3		6			
GENDER QUOTA	5					6	5	4		6		7		7		7

DZ – national parliamentary elections; EP – European Parliament elections

The criteria are ranked from 1–7; 1 means the criterion is the most important, 7 means the criterion is the least important.

The data in Table 4 reveal no large differences among the criteria employed in candidate selection among parties. Yet there are bigger differences among the criteria used in the two different elections. Nevertheless, the main criterion for the EP as well as the national parliamentary elections is the very broad category of eligibility. But eligibility is also the most important criteria for another reason. The criteria of eligibility define all other criteria – parties were in both cases trying to find out which criteria are associated with the eligibility of candidates. In the different institutional contexts of the EP and national parliamentary elections, eligibility was associated at least partly with the different personal characteristics of the aspirants. The analyses reveal that the parties tried to select those candidates with the biggest chances of being elected in the conditions of the different institutional contexts. For this reason the criteria employed in candidate selection for the EP and national parliamentary elections differ at least in part.

The interviews revealed that some new criteria were introduced for the EP elections. Besides some criteria usually used in making candidate selections for national parliamentary elections (for example, being familiar with and respecting the party's programme, long-term party and public activity, political experience, being well-known in the public, especially in local areas), the new criteria introduced specifically for the EP elections were: foreign language skills, awareness of topics connected to the EU, familiarity with EU institutions, qualifications, familiarity with and experience in asserting the party programme and its standpoints abroad, being known in all of Slovenia, and the legally defined minimum share (40%) of each gender on the list of candidates.

According to the representatives of the party selectors, the introduction of new criteria for EP elections did not mean the criteria for these elections were stricter, but rather that they were different since they were used for a different type of election. Representatives of party selectors explained that the criteria were different because they wanted to adapt to the different institutional context, and denied conducting any experimentation with new solutions for the new type of elections. They mentioned that the EP elections were special, seeing the whole of Slovenia as a single constituency. In addition, the parties had to form a national list of candidates for the first time. To make the lists more electoral appealing to the whole electorate they sought to balance the lists to the greatest extent possible – according to regional representation, age, gender, and education of candidates (objective personal characteristics). This confirms the findings of Gallagher (1988) that with proportional electoral systems the selectors' concern is not to maximise any one objective characteristic but to find a balance between a number of them on the ticket. Besides the importance of objective candidate characteristics, the representatives of the selectors also pointed to the importance of a candidate's personality – candidates at EP elections should be nationally and not merely locally known. On the other hand, in making candidate selections for EP elections some subjective personal characteristics were not among the most important ones (as with national parliamentary elections); for example, party loyalty, long-standing party membership, experience at lower levels of party activities, etc... According to the representatives of the party selectors this is connected with the fact that in the case of EP elections there is no formation of government and subjective personal characteristics are easily exchangeable with objective personal characteristics.

Another important reason for introducing different criteria in the two elections is the different characteristics of the two institutions (national parliament and EP) and the different function of the representatives. The party selectors indicated that an MEP, in contrast to an MP,

must not only have the ability to perform their elected function but also skills and experience in the international environment and language skills.

8. Conclusion

Although some elements of the electoral systems and consequently institutional contexts in the EP and national parliament elections did differ, we could find only minor differences in the formal rules on candidate selection for the two elections. Consequently, differences regarding the level of (de)centralisation, of internal democracy, as well as the criteria employed by selectors in candidate selections for the two elections, were also only minor.

On the other hand, the interviews with representatives of party selectors revealed a slightly different picture – a higher level of centralisation as well as a lower level of internal democracy when making candidate selections for the EP elections as opposed to national parliamentary elections. According to the findings of some scholars about the direction of influence concerning these elements and tendencies of the electoral system in Western European parties, we would expect the opposite development. But it seems some elements of the electoral system are more influential than others, especially the introduction of only one constituency for EP elections, which represents the most important element of the different institutional context. The establishment of just one constituency is usually associated with a lower level of decentralisation and a lower level of internal democracy. It seems that the introduction of this element of the electoral system for the European Parliamentary elections was more important for candidate selection than the possibility of preferential voting, as well as the smaller district magnitude (compared with national parliamentary elections), which are usually connected with a higher level of decentralisation and a higher level of internal democracy in making a candidate selection.

However, the criteria employed by the selectors in candidate selection for the two elections were more influenced by the different institutional contexts. Selectors in all parties employed more criteria for EP elections and also introduced new criteria just because the institutional context was different from that of national parliamentary elections.

We may conclude that in the case of Slovenia, the institutional context determined the aspects of candidate selection studied, especially the informal procedural practices for the two elections, but we can nevertheless hardly speak of it as having had a radical impact.

Notes

1. March and Olsen (1984) pointed out that the neoinstitutional approach has also been regularly used in sociology and economics.
2. Various authors apply a different typology of neoinstitutionalism. In political science two typologies are most frequently used. The first one is associated with March and Olsen (1984). They differentiated among normative, rational, historical, empirical, international, sociological and network neoinstitutionalism. The second typology is associated with Hall and Taylor (1996). According to them, there are three types of neoinstitutionalism: historical, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism.

3. Lundell (2004) employed several characteristics of parties as factors which could explain differences in candidate selection among parties in a particular country: party ideology, party size, and party age. After an extensive analysis he revealed some influence of all three factors on the arrangement of candidate selection, but none of them were statistically significant.
4. The (de)centralisation of candidate selection can also be corporate or functional. In this case, we would say different groups in parties (for example, women's organisations, workers' organisations, youth organisations) have a major or minor influence in the process (Rahat, Hazan 2001).
5. There are two sorts of American primaries, namely open and closed ones. In the case of open primaries we find the highest possible inclusiveness, while in the case of closed primaries we find membership ballots (Rahat, Hazan 2001).
6. In the past (closed) primaries or membership ballots were a traditional process in Belgian parties although it is currently hard to find them in these parties (Deschouwer 1994). According to Hazan (2002), membership ballots can, in the new millennium, be found in Finland and (sometimes) in individual parties in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Probably most public attention in the last decade has been paid to membership ballots in France in 2006 – the French Socialist Party selected its candidate for the 2007 presidential elections through (e-)membership ballots.
7. When assessing the even greater extent of inclusiveness of territorial or functional organisations in candidate selection, some scholars wrongly describe it as a higher level of democracy – this in fact only represents a higher level of decentralisation (Rahat, Hazan 2001).
8. Democratisation or adaptation can be more precisely described as a modest rather than a major democratisation (Bille 2001).
9. As Duverger (in Gallagher 1988: 6) remarked, parties do not like the odours of the electoral kitchen to spread to the outside world.
10. There are two of the most important elements of the majority electoral system within the general proportional electoral system in Slovenia, namely the formally defined threshold of 4% and the structure of voting when voters have to cast a vote for an individual candidate. On the other hand, the fact there are eight constituencies introduces to a limited extent some distance from a purely proportional electoral system, while district magnitude is such (11) that it is usually not described as an element of the majority electoral system.
11. According to Grad (2004), the formal threshold in the case of the EP elections was not needed since a low number of MEPs determines a naturally high threshold.
12. In the EP elections 76.8% of all votes cast were preferential votes.
13. We can briefly present some elements which confirm the contention of second-order elections: voter turnout was substantially lower at the EP (28%) than at previous national parliamentary elections (between 85% and 60%); oppositional parties recorded greater success than governmental parties (especially the NSi but also the SDS in contrast to the LDS, SD and SLS); parties have not tried to mobilize voters to the same extent as in the national Parliament elections – they devoted less time and money to the EP than for national parliamentary elections, also only a handful prominent politicians were among candidates at the EP elections, for example Pahor, Peterle and Kacin (for more on the EP elections as second-order elections, see Krašovec et al. 2005).

List of abbreviations

DeSUS	Demokratična stranka upokojenecv Slovenije (Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia)
LDS	Liberalna demokracija Slovenije (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia)
NSi	Nova Slovenija (New Slovenia)
SD	Socialni demokrati (Social Democrats)

- SDS Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party)
 SLS Slovenska ljudska stranka (Slovenian People's Party)
 SMS Stranka mladih Slovenije (Youth Party of Slovenia)
 SNS Slovenska nacionalna stranka (Slovenian National Party)

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