

eastern Agenda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP
no. 15 Autumn 2006

Electing Bedford's Mayor



Christine McHugh and Andrew Duff on track to victory in Bedford's mayoral election

Christine McHugh wants to be Mayor of Bedford. Next May she will champion the Liberal Democrat cause in a direct election against the incumbent Mayor, an independent.

Directly-elected mayors are one of the few remaining fruits of the Labour government's endless tinkering with English local government in England. In their latest White Paper – *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – ministers seek to strengthen local leadership and devolve power to local decision-makers. Do they reckon on Christine McHugh?

The White Paper commits the government to creating more directly elected mayors, elected for a four year term. Directly elected mayors are the government's favourite 'strong leadership model'. Outside London, there are currently 11 elected mayors.

The model of the elected mayor is not one with which the Liberal Democrats have a natural sympathy. It concentrates power in the hands of one person who cannot be ousted from office during his or her term no matter how direly they may perform. The Mayors wield enormous power. For example, the Mayor needs the support only of one third of the full Council in order to carry the policy framework and annual budget. Even if over two thirds of ordinary councillors oppose the Mayor's proposals, they cannot introduce their own budget.



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Whatever the rights or wrongs of the mayoral system, where there's power, there should be Liberal Democrats contesting it. 'Strong leadership models' work best when Lib Dems provide the leadership.

In the East of England there are already two directly elected Mayors. In Watford we have Lib Dem star Dorothy Thornhill, who was re-elected for a second term this year. Dorothy's success in the Mayoral and Borough elections provided a good springboard for Sal Brinton's strong challenge in the Watford parliamentary seat, now a top target for the party at the next general election.

In Bedford Borough, which covers almost two parliamentary constituencies, the Lib Dems are already in second place. In February 2002 a referendum accepted the proposal for a directly elected Mayor, backed by the town's Labour MP, the local Conservatives and the owner and former editor of one of the local weekly papers. A 16 per cent turnout voted Yes by two to one. In October 2002 the newspaper owner, who by this time had set up his own political party called *Better Bedford*, was elected on a turnout of 25 per cent. Each voter had two preference votes, and Lib Dem candidate Christine McHugh swept ahead of both her Conservative and Labour rivals to finish second.

Since then, *Better Bedford* has run candidates at all local elections, largely unsuccessfully. They have even managed a split with the formation of a new political party, *ABC* (don't ask!).

Campaign trail

The Liberal Democrats have been the first party to select their candidate for next May. We have hit the campaign trail hard. Three newspapers, distributed to 40,000 households, have already been produced this year. Christine made a Lib Dem Village Tour during the summer, visiting each of the 42 rural parishes, knocking on doors and conducting surveys. Recently, Christine and her team have been campaigning against threats to Bedford Hospital. Action weekends take place monthly. Andrew Duff has been busy campaigning in Bedford, supporting the exciting ecological and recreational development of Bedford River Valley Park and helping with the party's Green Tax Switch Campaign.

Bedford is due for an uplift. Under great pressure from housing development, the town needs sustained revitalization. With Mayor McHugh, big things will happen in Bedford.

The Liberal Democrats in Bedford have a real chance of success next May. If you would like to help the campaign to elect the region's second Liberal Democrat Mayor, please get in touch via www.mchugh.org.uk or www.bedfordlibdems.org.uk or phone local party chair Dave Hodgson on 07976 205116. All financial contributions to the campaign will be very much appreciated - and very well used.

Saving Bedford's Hospital:
Michael Headley, Mark
Chapman, Christine and
Andrew



Knowledgeable Europe

The European Commission has published its proposal to establish a European Institute of Technology (EIT). It believes that the Institute is a crucial instrument in delivering one of the priority objectives of the Lisbon agenda, namely, to get Europe buzzing as a knowledge economy.

The Institute is to be a 'new flagship for excellence'. The EIT will bring 'a fresh approach to bridging the gap between science and society', acting 'as a reference model to inspire and guide long term change'. President Barroso admits he borrows his concept directly from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), arguing cogently enough that Europe lags behind the US in developing the virtuous 'knowledge triangle' of education, research and innovation.

We cannot be complacent about the state of European higher education. The respected Shanghai world academic ranking finds that the EU hosts only eight of the top fifty research universities (five of them British). The scientific brain drain away from Europe towards America and, increasingly, the Far East continues. If the trend is to be reversed, European science and technology has to be made more obviously useful to business and society. An EIT that could persuade industry to invest long-term in quantum physics or that could develop business expertise in combating climate change would be valuable indeed.

The Commission has properly identified both supply and demand measures that are needed to intensify the interaction between science and industry. Higher salaries for seconded academics will be particularly popular, as will the idea of concentrating resources on a small number of elite university faculties and research institutes bound together in specialised 'knowledge communities' for up to fifteen years.

The EIT will be more node than network, run independently of the Commission by an academic governing body. One hopes that the EIT will drive European academia towards thoroughly practical, widely intelligible outcomes. The Institute should itself be able to pick up good ideas which single universities are too small or poor to develop on their own. There could also be a useful role for an enterprising EIT in fashioning improvements to Europe's intellectual property regime.

The EIT proposal arouses inevitable jealousies in Europe's powerful academic community. Most European universities are conservative, and short of cash. They will have to be bought off generously before they accept the foreign interloper of the EIT. The question of degrees is particularly sensitive. Having listened to its consultations, the Commission is suggesting that the EIT should merely brand existing degree courses from the best university faculties.

The EIT needs significant funding from the EU budget as well as sponsorship from the private sector. But the weak financial settlement for overall R&D now agreed by the EU for 2007-13 rather undermines confidence that this will be forthcoming. Mr Barroso should remind the Council that in 2005 MIT enjoyed a budget of over \$ 2 billion.

And then there is the thorny question of where the EIT HQ is to be sited. The truth is that EIT would be best placed amid Europe's largest existing hi-tech cluster. This is Cambridge, Europe's top international university, which already spawns hundreds of businesses across a broad spectrum of science and technology, including Microsoft's European laboratory. It also boasts a unique formal partnership with MIT. Cambridge's success as a world leader in the knowledge-based economy is not unconnected with its proximity to the venture capitalists in the City of London.

Cambridge is the obvious home for EIT. Whether or not Cambridge will defy traditional British indifference to the European Union to win the prize is another matter altogether.



Andrew inspects the new Channel Tunnel rail link at Thurrock, to be opened in late 2007

'Plan B' for the European Constitution

Guillaume McLaughlin reports on the launch of Andrew Duff's important new initiative



Andrew presents Plan B to José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission

The European Constitution has to be rescued by renegotiation.

This is the main message of Andrew Duff's new pamphlet, published by the influential think-tank *Notre Europe*. The launch took place in Brussels on 18 October, to a packed meeting.

Regular readers of *eastern Agenda* will not need reminding of our MEP's conviction that the European Union needs to complete its constitutional process in order to be fully equipped to meet the demands of the 21st Century and the aspirations of a large majority of its citizens. At the launch, Andrew asserted: "Without the constitution, Europe will lack internal cohesion and external strength, and the EU's development into a mature, post-national democracy will be halted".

Everyone now recognises that, following the French and Dutch referendum Noes in 2005, the constitutional treaty cannot come into force without serious revision. (Only 15 member states have ratified it – with Finland to follow – out of 25.) Two things must be avoided, however. First, to open up the whole package deal for review, as some have suggested, would almost certainly result in something worse. Second, to merely dissect or reduce the text, as others have suggested, would be both legally impossible and politically improbable. "Simplistic solutions will not work", said Andrew.

Instead, the 2004 text must be ring-fenced where the consensus behind it still holds good. This applies to its key proposals on powers, instruments and decision-making procedures.

Radical reform of EU policies

Five areas of EU common policy are suggested by Andrew for fairly radical reform. First economic policy making must be strengthened, particularly for the eurozone. Second, Europe's famous 'social model' should be modernised in the quest for both greater equity and efficiency. Different national or regional approaches to social policy issues should be accommodated within a common framework.

Third, combating climate change should become the imperative to which all common policies need to conform. "This is the right way to push forward reform of the CAP," argues Andrew, "as well as to develop the much-needed common EU energy policy".

Fourth, the new constitutional treaty should spell out the enlargement policy of the Union, making clear how hard it is for candidate countries to join, and how membership applications are managed. Lastly, we need a revised financial system, covering both revenue and expenditure, which will allow the EU's budget better to match its political priorities.

Commission responds

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission, joined Andrew for the launch of *Plan B*, and gave the first public statement by the Commission on the constitution for many months. She commended the pamphlet as being “rich of ideas and pertinent analyses”. Andrew’s proposals, she said, are “extremely ambitious and some of them are very attractive”.

Wallström backed the idea of ring-fencing the key constitutional components of the 2004 treaty. She posed the question of how we could engage public opinion on the constitution next time round, and repeated her own belief in the rapid emergence of what she calls “the European Public Sphere”.

Parliament's contribution

So, helped along by ALDE’s spokesman on constitutional affairs, and despite a deadly silence on the matter at Westminster, the European Union is beginning to face up to a further round of constitutional change.

MEPs must be fully engaged in this process, bringing their expertise in reconciling competing interests to the good of the whole.

Experience suggests that government ministers and officials cannot succeed on their own. The method of rescuing the stalled constitution must be as parliamentary as possible in what *Plan B* describes as “constitutional co-decision”. Although tempted by another Convention, Andrew exercises commendable restraint when it comes to making proposals about the process of renegotiation. He wants the tried and tested method of co-decision and conciliation between Council and Parliament to be used on the new treaty text.

The influential Agence Europe was one of many commentators who have hailed Andrew Duff’s initiative. ‘At last! A Plan B worthy of the name’.

Plan B: how to rescue the European Constitution can be downloaded (in English and French) from www.andrewduffmep.org and www.notre-europe.eu.



At the launch of ‘Plan B’: Andrew, Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul of Notre Europe, and Vice-President of the European Commission Margot Wallström



Standing room only for ‘Plan B’ in Brussels - and at the Lib Dem conference in Brighton, where Michael Moore MP, Foreign Affairs Spokesman, joined Andrew for the debate



Not a time to be timid

Pat Cox, President of the International European Movement, speaks to the 27th Congress of the European Liberal Democrats (ELDR) in Bucharest, 12 October 2006



Irish Liberal Pat Cox was President of the European Parliament 2002-04

Bulgarian and Romania are to join the European Union on 1 January 2007. Their accession will bring closure to the second part of the European Union's fifth enlargement. It is an important step which marks the delivery of a contract of mutual expectations that in a post cold war Europe was both an historic and a moral contract.

The membership of Bulgaria and Romania also draws a line under enlargement for some time and permits in a true sense a period of reflection.

We can be proud of the role played by Liberals for what was an unwavering commitment to this new European settlement. The scholar Joseph Nye has defined soft power as 'the ability to get

what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals'. Arguably the fifth enlargement is the most powerful act of soft power transformation ever on our continent. For the first time by the free will of free and sovereign states and peoples we have created a voluntary imperium spanning our old continent. It is a proof of the enduring but evolving role of the EU and its institutions.

EU-27 with more than 490 million people will be the third biggest population base in the world after China and India, larger than the USA and Russia combined. We account for one fifth of global wealth. We export more than the USA.

The euro is the second most important reserve currency in the world. Collectively through our states and our Union we are the world leader in humanitarian and development aid. We lead the world in multilateral initiatives such as the Kyoto process and climate change, the International Criminal Court and the Millennium Development Goals.

In short, our policy and territorial extensions through successive treaties and enlargements have deepened and widened our capacity to act. Enlargement, notwithstanding some popular misconceptions, is proving to be a win-win situation for all involved.

Enlargement fatigue

Yet, where there is economic stagnation, high unemployment, poor performance and management and, frankly, poor political leadership, many ordinary Europeans have the blues. It is shocking to read polls in Western Europe that report on the idea of Europe long a symbol and catalyst of hope, for many, becoming a symbol and catalyst of fear. We know from our history that fear is a breeding ground for populists.

These populist tendencies have found a new and more energetic expression in recent years on our continent and on both the left and right of the political spectrum. The conventional political domain is not immune from the effects of this new populism which expresses itself in creeping nationalism, anti

Europeanism, economic patriotism, cautious and conservative corporatism and neo-protectionism.

In the battle for hearts and minds who will defend openness if not Liberals? Who will confront populist stereotypes and caricatures of ultra-liberalism and super-statism if not Liberals?

The EU, its states and its peoples will find no comfort in building illusory Maginot lines. Yesterday's defensive solutions are not the answer to tomorrow's pressing challenges.

We Europeans in the second half of the 20th century designed the most sophisticated institutions ever to foster intelligent interdependence between sovereign states. For tomorrow's world surely this has to be a cause for hope. Yet to survive and thrive ideas cannot stagnate. They must evolve. Adaptation is the key.

At our current crossroads, after the Constitutional Treaty referendum shocks, one can understand the emphasis on a 'Europe of projects' or 'a Europe of results' as it referred to by some. Institutions and decision making procedures though relevant do not count for much in day to day life if they are perceived as not yielding real and relevant outcomes.

Pragmatism matters. Wider vision uprooted from solid practicalities will do little to promote Europe but the opposite also risks being true. I believe that Europe also needs what Schuman called 'a common purpose'. This is less visible today than it needs to be. It needs consistent and determined leadership to drive it forward.

Liberal challenges

Our challenge is how to expand our soft power and how to promote and defend our common EU values and interests in smart power terms but do so without the constant expansion of our borders and on terms sufficiently attractive to our neighbours that they would wish to opt in.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome we should use this moment creatively. The statement of our generation's level of ambition should be high. The European Commission and the European Parliament have a particularly heavy responsibility in this regard since uniquely they are charged with a Union-wide duty of care.

Our fortunate legacy from yesterday's post Second World War European leaders is that their institutional innovations allowed us to discover the best in each other and to profit from that in our internal and external relations.

In a Europe increasingly confronted by popular anxieties this is not a time to be timid.



Andrew appeals to the ELDR Congress in Bucharest to combat prejudice against Turkey



Andrew discusses civil liberties with a delegation of Sikhs from across the EU

Green Tax Switch

East of England Liberal Democrats launched their Green Tax Switch campaign on 21 October. The party is aiming to cut income tax by two pence in the pound and to increase taxation on things that pollute. The overall burden of taxation will be revenue neutral.

Andrew Duff, who spearheaded the launch of the Green Tax Switch in the Region, was given a 100% 'green' rating by Friends of the Earth. He said:

'Lib Dems want to put the UK in the forefront of European environmental policy. We are proposing new, intelligent and efficient methods to reach EU targets on cutting carbon emissions.

'Tax incentives to save energy and cut pollution are the right way forward. Under Lib Dem plans, those who cause most environmental damage will pay most tax. Revenues from eco-taxes will allow us to cut income tax.

'So it's a win-win policy: fair, simple and green.'



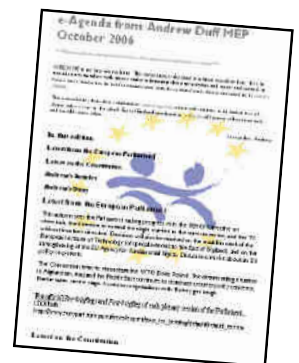
Our constituency disappears under the North Sea

! Launch of e-Agenda !

We have launched a new email tool to keep members and supporters in more regular touch with the work of their MEP.

To subscribe to this interactive newsletter, email ea@andrewduffmep.org (putting 'subscribe' in the header).

Eagenda is a supplement to, and not a substitute for, *eastern Agenda*.



Lib Dems in St Albans turning on the Green Tax Switch

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INTERN WANTED

Andrew Duff and the Lib Dem Regional Assembly Group (EERA) are inviting applications for a part-time intern to assist in the Cambridge office.

This internship is the perfect way to get valuable experience in European and local politics.

There is plenty to do!

INTERESTED?

Contact Tim Huggan on 01223 566700 or email tim@andrewduffmep.org with your c.v.

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