

# eastern Agenda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP  
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## A Year to Remember



**Andrew Duff has been the Liberal Democrat Member of the European Parliament for the East of England since 1999, and is leader of the Liberal Democrat MEPs. In October he was elected President of the United European Federalists (UEF) – a supranational political movement founded in 1947.**

[www.federalists.eu](http://www.federalists.eu).

### *Bad economy*

The recession looks to be much worse than initially forecast. Billions of dollars and euros have been spent by governments in trying to re-capitalise the banks and to kick-start the flow of credit. By the time the European Parliamentary elections get under way in the spring, unemployment and bankruptcies will be all too common, with rather uncertain social and political consequences in several countries, especially among generations that have never known a depression.

Within the European Union it has been difficult to achieve agreement on a common approach. The French presidency again showed an assured touch in convening the right meetings at the right time to achieve the re-capitalisation of European banks, to prevent beggar-thy-neighbour policies (evident in the first Irish reaction to the crisis). Finally, M. Sarkozy got his fellow heads of government to accept the European Commission's proposal for an economic recovery plan, boosting spending by 1.5 per cent of GDP. The resources of the EU budget, however, are relatively small to make more than a small injection of capital into Europe's ailing economy. For the record, the 2009 EU budget is set at €116.096 billion which amounts to 0.894 percent of the European Union's Gross National Income (GNI). But Germany, with by far the largest national economy in the EU, is refusing to follow the Keynesian path taken by France (boosting public investment in public infrastructure) or by the UK (lowering VAT).

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Meanwhile there is a currency crisis. The euro has soared in value against both the dollar and the pound. Sterling has now reached parity with the euro, opening up at long last the opportunity for a decent debate about whether or not the two should join up. Were Gordon Brown to declare his serious intent on membership of the single currency, he would stabilise the exchange rate and bring the whole weight of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt to the assistance of the Bank of England. But to give Britain a realistic chance of joining the eurozone, both Labour and the Liberal Democrats would have to drop their promises to hold a referendum on the future of the currency. Those pledges were in my view always undeliverable: demagoguery and serious monetary decisions are not good bed-fellows. If the government is looking for a way to entrench a decision to join the euro and to defend it against a future attempt by the Conservatives to go backwards, it should introduce proportional representation for the House of Commons (thereby establishing conditions for a cross-party pro-Europe majority at Westminster).

Once the UK had become a full player within the eurozone, the European Union could deepen the culture of integration in its policy making. The fact is that there are no national solutions to the monetary and economic crisis, and every prime minister -- and indeed Chancellor -- should stop pretending that there are. The European Commission and Central Bank deserve firm backing. A more consensual approach is badly needed to formulate new banking rules enforcing transparency, and to raising fresh investment in leading technologies. Tax payers should not have to bear the consequences of weak European leadership.

### *Climate change*

In December, after eleven months of legislative work, the European Parliament gave its backing to the EU's climate change and energy policy package which aims to ensure that the EU will achieve its climate targets by 2020: a 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, a 20 per cent improvement in energy efficiency, and a 20 per cent share for renewables in the EU energy mix. Ahead of Parliament's first-reading vote, MEPs had reached informal agreements with the French Presidency on six important proposals which all fall under the co-decision procedure, placing the European Parliament and Council on an equal footing as co-legislators. The six laws concerned the regulation and development of renewable energy sources, a review of the carbon emissions trading system, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the geological storage of carbon dioxide, and the tougher monitoring of fuel emissions from marine and road vehicles.

ALDE Members were prominent at all stages of this large and complex law making machine. My colleague Chris Davies (North West) was rapporteur for the part of the package on carbon capture and storage, extracting large sums of money to spend on experiments with the new technology of carbon sequestration from coal-fired power stations. The EU is now well-placed to take a lead in preparing for the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen next December. The message is that Europe is serious about delivering a low carbon economy. The current economic situation reinforces the need for sustainable growth, as we look to leaders to build resilient economies that are insulated from global shocks. The cost of inaction outweighs the cost of action. Further delay will only increase costs.

### *Strong leadership*

These critical months have demonstrated that the EU cannot do without strong leadership. Had it not been for the hyper-active, if somewhat erratic, character of Nicolas Sarkozy, the EU would hardly have dealt with the succession of crises which hit it in 2008 -- starting with the Irish No to the Treaty of Lisbon in June. In the aftermath of the vote, Sarkozy went to Dublin with some blunt truths: the EU would not agree to renegotiate the Treaty; therefore, Ireland would have to vote again. What had seemed rather shocking in July was accepted without demur by December. Some difficult legal contortions will be needed to sign off on a package of measures that is designed to provide Taoiseach Brian Cowen with enough campaigning material with which to get Ireland's voters to change their mind in a second referendum next October.

A second failure on Lisbon would be devastating for the Union. If the Irish are to be persuaded to say Yes, they will have to be brought to understand not only the benefits that will flow to them in terms of European solidarity if Lisbon enters into force, but also the seriousness of the consequences -- for Ireland and all Europe -- if it does not. Without Lisbon the EU will remain under-performing and incapacitated. Lisbon is a decisive turning point for the Union, and the rendezvous must not be missed. Now it is up to Ireland to raise the scale of its own ambition to be a modern European country. Responding positively to President Sarkozy's leadership would be a good signal.

In his six months' term of office as EU president, Nicolas Sarkozy has convened four meetings of the European Council, one summit of the Eurogroup (in the company, amazingly, of Gordon Brown), and one summit of the four EU leaders of G8. "J'ai bougé l'Europe," he declared on his third appearance before the European Parliament (16 December), "mais l'Europe m'a changé".

#### *The battle against nationalism*

Federalists (and Liberal Democrats) need not complain about this refreshing change of heart from a French Gaullist. (Would that the British Tories would follow the French example.) The challenge across Europe is to promote the aspiration and prospect of a more progressive society where education outpaces privilege and where the forces of European cohesion beat those of nationalistic division. This means beating conservatives and nationalists at elections.

Unfortunately, because of the stalling of Lisbon, the European Parliament will go into next June's European elections and the appointment of the new President of the European Commission in July without knowing how powerful either institution is to be. It is a particular shame to have to be asking citizens to vote for a Parliament whose powers are uncertain.

The 2009 electoral campaign was supposed to be about what policies the reformed and strengthened EU should deliver. It looks, on the contrary, as if stale arguments about sovereignty will dominate the campaign in many countries. How absurd, now some way into the 21st century, to be still having an existential debate about 'Europe: yes or no' – when our political parties should be being tested about their choice of candidates and policy programmes.

However, as this European Parliament nears the close of its term, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) shows no sign of fatigue. Rather the contrary. Our MEPs have taken the lead in negotiating the climate change and common energy package, which is destined to fashion our lives directly for the foreseeable future. We have stuck to our guns on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. We have stood out for strong common policies on both legal and illegal migration. We have been the champions of fundamental rights.

We have taken the lead in arguing for a radical reappraisal of NATO (taking advantage of the French decision to reintegrate its military with the Atlantic Alliance), and in exploiting the arrival of Mr Obama to refurbish the transatlantic partnership. And we continue our campaign, where others have flagged, to salvage the Treaty of Lisbon which will, in our opinion, provide many answers to our current clutch of woes.

Happy New Year!



**Nick Clegg MP has had his first full year in charge of the Liberal Democrats. He is the first party leader in the UK to have been a former MEP.**

# Electoral reform of the European Parliament



**Andrew Duff is the Parliament's rapporteur (or draftsman) on electoral reform. But he faces an uphill struggle to get agreement.**

After a break of more than ten years, the European Parliament is again considering a reform of its own electoral system. Who should be its rapporteur (or draftsman) on electoral reform but the East of England's very own MEP, Andrew Duff? In a previous life, Duff played a significant part in persuading the new Labour government to introduce proportional representation for the elections to the European Parliament.

The changes Andrew Duff envisages are pitched at 2014 and not next June's elections. "But it is right that, as the Parliament is set to gain many new powers under the Treaty of Lisbon, it now reconsiders its method of election", says Duff. "At the very least, MEPs should be worried about turnout, which has been falling steadily in most countries since direct elections were introduced in 1979."

Parliament is now considering Andrew Duff's ambitious package of reforms. The key change will be to supplement the national or regional constituency MEPs with a small number of Members elected from a pan-European transnational constituency. The purpose of this is two-fold: to galvanise the European political parties which would be responsible for selecting candidates, and to Europeanise the campaign.

"At the moment, European election campaigns are too parochial. Domestic issues dominate; EU issues are frequently ignored", argues Andrew. "It is a pity that national political parties seem incapable of addressing the European dimension of issues which concern the public. European political parties, built around the parliamentary party groups like ALDE, must come to the rescue of post-national democracy." Competition between a number of leading European personalities would also help the media report the election campaign, Duff believes.

Duff's proposed EU wide list would be gender balanced. He proposes a minimum voting age of 16, and limits to campaign expenses. Voting for the transnational list would be by the 'semi-open' method, whereby voters may choose between individual candidates and not only between closed party lists (as is still the case in the UK).

In another break with tradition, Duff proposes that regional constituencies should be created within all the larger member states of the Union (this time like the UK). On smaller matters, national discretion would still be allowed to apply. "This is not uniformity for its own sake," says Andrew Duff, "but a modernisation of the electoral system to reflect the growing importance of Europe to people's lives in general and to strengthen Parliament's popular legitimacy, in particular".

Nevertheless, Duff's Report on Electoral Reform is already proving to be very controversial in the Parliament, with the Socialists opposing the idea of a transnational list.

If and when the package is agreed by MEPs, it will be up to the Council of Ministers to consider the proposals. After a process of conciliation between Parliament and Council, every government and national parliament, in addition to the European Parliament, will have to give their consent to the final deal. Andrew Duff is not expecting an outcome in a hurry.

# Discovering the Liberal Democrats

*Charlie Cadywould joined Andrew's team as an intern in September. Here he records his first impressions.*

What struck me straight away during my first morning at conference in Bournemouth was that, confusingly, everyone was extremely pleasant and friendly. As a complete newcomer to the world of party politics, this struck me as very strange indeed. Where was all the scandal, careerism and back-stabbing that many consider to be a necessary feature of politics?

After I had arrived, registered and taken my first batch of free pens, badges, magazines, newspapers and bags-for-life from the exhibition hall, I attended a fringe event on the impact of ID cards. While the free lunch I had been promised did not live up to my expectations, the debate, which covered not only the ID card proposals by the government, but also the merits and drawbacks of the 'no ID no sale' campaign, was lively and interesting.

Finding my way back to the main conference building, I took a seat in the main hall to watch the debates on party policy. Simon Wright's passionate speech in support of removing innocent people from DNA databases stuck in my mind particularly. This was no orchestrated showpiece of party unity; this was real debate, voted on by party members, which influenced party policy. My politics teacher at school once told me that "Party members are just the extras in the great theatre of politics". Maybe in his Labour party, but not here.

I continued to enjoy the conference, and while I must admit that the Glee Club was a strange experience, I was able to admire the people that showed their commitment to the party by singing their loyalty into a microphone, despite being entirely tone-deaf.

It impressed me that after what must have been a late and merry last night in Bournemouth for many, everyone flocked to the main hall to see Nick Clegg's speech the next morning. He spoke extremely well, with enough in his speech to inspire party members to campaign harder than ever, while also underlining the party's message to the rest of the country.

After Bournemouth however, conference season wasn't over. I was also able to attend the East of England Conference in Huntingdon. Andrew Duff's speech was particularly impressive, as it outlined the pro-Europe argument in an understandable and succinct manner – something which the party has failed to do on occasions.

I was delighted to be able to join up with the Chelmsford Liberal Democrats on a trip to Brussels. The focus of the trip was to learn more about the workings of the EU, the parliament, and the ALDE group. After an unplanned walk around the sights of Brussels (we found our hotel eventually), it was straight down to the programme, which included a presentation from the European Commission, the Liberal group in the Committee of the Regions, as well as a briefing with MEPs.

The highlight for me was the tour of the parliament building, which included attending a debate held by ALDE on the small arms trade in Africa. My overall impression of Brussels was that while at first glance the vast network of institutions in the EU can appear complex, this is a system which is working and a party which wants to move it further in the right direction.

My conference experiences, my short trip to Brussels, and my first few months working for the Liberal Democrats have reaffirmed my belief that the party is moving forward, and that it is staying true to its core values.



**Charlie Cadywould with Andrew Duff in the Cambridge Office**

# A journey through the Party - rewarding the kindness of strangers

*Ros Scott writes about her successful campaign to become president of the Liberal Democrats*



**Ros speaks to East of England Liberal Democrats at Bournemouth at the official start to her run for President of the party**

It seems like a long time since thoughts of standing for the Party Presidency first crossed my mind. Indeed, I started talking to some trusted friends on the subject more than two years ago. Encouraged by their response, I began to explore the inner workings of the Party, rapidly confirming my sense that here was a job where I could make a real difference.

So, I had a motive, and the impending end of Simon Hughes's term as President gave me the opportunity. What I needed was a winning campaign. At times like this, you need the best you can get. Step forward Chris White and Bridget Harris, my agent and campaign manager respectively, backed up by the amazing IT skills of Keith Harris.

The campaign itself would be very familiar in style to most Lib Dem activists, but with a very large constituency (more than 60,000 voters spread across the country and beyond). Starting with a programme of raising awareness of both candidate and campaign, developing key messages through surveys and face to face contact and then encouraging supporters to get involved and help get the word out to the members, the influence of ALDC-style community campaigning ran through our efforts like lettering through a stick of rock.

While Chris, Bridget and many others worked on building the campaign, I travelled the country with Mark (whom I first met when I wanted someone to explain candidate approval and selection), meeting members, making speeches, supporting local campaigns and finding out what local parties, activists, councillors and candidates want from the Party centrally. A short break in April - well, it was our honeymoon - and then six months of solid campaigning.

### *The campaign catches fire*

By the summer, the campaign had become virtually a full-time activity. August saw us in places as far afield as Orkney, St Austell and Pembrokeshire. In St Andrews, my speech to a gathering of members was interrupted by the smell of smoke. One of the members had gotten too close to a candle and his jacket caught fire...

People beyond the campaign team were paying more attention too. Until then, we had no idea how well we might be doing, but the first independent poll of members indicated that I had real prospects of winning. Overnight, I seemed to change from being the plucky outsider to the alleged establishment candidate, but as far as the campaign team was concerned, nothing changed. A wave of e-mail, leaflets and telephone canvassing broke over an unsuspecting Party through September and October, based on a network of regional campaign chairs (take a bow, Kathy Pollard), who were local councillors and activists, and even the odd MP.

### *Victory - and the work to come*

And so the day of the count dawned. It became apparent early on in the proceedings that I was ahead, but the scale of the margin came as a surprise to everyone, the campaign team included. With such a mandate comes a tremendous sense of responsibility though. I am clear that members have placed their trust in

me to work towards a party that makes everyone feel part of a genuine political movement.

In pursuit of that goal, I will strive to represent the views of all of our members, improving the way the centre engages with local and regional parties, building structures that enable local campaigns to succeed by being better resourced, better structured and more responsive.

The party is about more than our MPs, important though they are. In the East of England, our MEP, councillors, party officers, right down to deliveres and those who stuff envelopes, all serve to get our message to voters across the region. We owe it to all of you to give you something to campaign for and with, and as your President, and with your support, I will dedicate the coming months and years to that task.

**And the result:**

**Ros Scott 20736 votes (72%)**  
**Lembit Opik MP 6247 votes (22%)**  
**Chandila Fernando 1799 votes (6%)**



**Ros Scott (pictured here with her Campaign Manager Chris White) was a Suffolk district and county councillor. She was second on the Lib Dem list in the 1999 European Parliamentary elections, and was subsequently ennobled as Baroness Scott of Needham Market.**

(Picture Courtesy of John Halliday)



**This Post Office in Norwich was saved from closure by a strong Lib Dem campaign. Seen here, with the postmaster (second left) is Simon Wright, parliamentary spokesman for Norwich South, Andrew Duff, Linda Jack, and Gary Chambers.**



**Fiona Whelan with Cambridge MP David Howarth and Andrew Duff. Fiona capped a run of Lib Dem by-election victories by taking Hardwick from the Tories on Cambridgeshire County Council at the end of November.**

(Picture Courtesy of John Halliday)

**below:**

**In heavy rain, Andrew Duff listens to farmers at Barway in the Fens. A European Commission proposal to tighten the regulation of pesticides has caused an outcry among the region's horticultural producers.**



**Andrew Duff and Parliamentary spokesman Stephen Robinson surveying in Chelmsford**

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### eastern Agenda is 20!

Eastern Agenda has been appearing twice a year for ten years, since Andrew Duff's first election as MEP in 1999. It is distributed free of charge to all Liberal Democrat members in the East of England, and attempts to keep the party informed about Andrew's activities in the Parliament and across the region.

More information is available on-line at [www.andrewduff.eu](http://www.andrewduff.eu) and [www.libdemmeps.eu](http://www.libdemmeps.eu).



Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
Alliance des Démocrates et des Libéraux pour l'Europe

**eastern Agenda**  
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