

# eastern **A**genda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP  
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## Europe Turns a Page

*Andrew Duff reports on historic events in the European Union*



**New EU foreign minister Catherine Ashton speaks at a rally organised by Andrew Duff in the European Parliament on the day the Lisbon treaty came into force. Next to Andrew is Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the Liberal MEPs.**

The Lisbon treaty came into force, at long last, on December 1. Europe has turned a page. The long and controversial struggle to reform the government of the EU is over. After the massive Irish yes to Lisbon in their second referendum in October, the last serious obstacles to reform were quickly removed. Even that arch-nationalist, President Vaclav Klaus of the Czech Republic was impelled to sign the ratification instrument – all the while protesting the end of Czech sovereignty.

Regular readers of *eastern Agenda* will know that the Lisbon treaty and its various predecessors have been my principle preoccupation since joining the European Parliament in 1999. It was good to be asked to join the prime ministers in Lisbon for a celebration on the evening of 1 December. Earlier that day I organised a large party in the European Parliament in Brussels for MEPs and staff from the four main political groups – Christian Democrats, socialists, liberals and greens. Even if Lisbon was the city where it ended, the main impetus for constitutional change had initially come from the Parliament. The passage into force of Lisbon marks the coming of age of the European Parliament. The European Union as a whole gets to be better organised and more united, and therefore a stronger player at home and abroad.

### *Tories exposed*

The entry into force of the Lisbon treaty poses a huge problem for David Cameron and the Conservative party. Mr Cameron has been forced to spell out how he intends to deal with the EU run under the Lisbon rules, which he so bitterly opposes.

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Mr Cameron's plan is to entrench in UK law an obligation to hold a referendum whenever further competences are transferred to the EU and if and when Britain decides to join the euro. He wants a "UK Sovereignty Act" to put the British supreme court above that of the European Court of Justice in matters of *ultra vires* – essentially who does what. This would be in breach of EU law.

A Conservative government in Britain, apparently, will insist on there being an act of the UK parliament every time there is a shift in Council decision-making procedures from unanimity towards qualified majority vote. Mr Cameron pretends to believe that such pragmatic reforms, which are provided for by Lisbon, are part of a "self-amending" conspiracy plot to "ratchet" up the federal character of the Union. The fact is that no change, however minor, can be made to national veto powers without the unanimous consent of all EU states.

Mr Cameron hates citizens' rights. He wants the UK to opt out entirely from the EU's own Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is made binding by Lisbon. He also refuses to accept that the EU itself, in addition to its member states, should become a signatory to the earlier European Convention on Human Rights. Indeed, a Tory government would repeal the Human Rights Act (2000) which incorporates the ECHR into British domestic law.

Likewise, Mr Cameron would discard Britain's carefully negotiated opt-ins to EU justice and home affairs policies in favour of casual opt-outs, on a case by case basis. This means that the UK would stand aside from practical measures taken by the EU to strengthen the fight against international organised crime and to put in place serious common asylum and immigration policies. Integration in the area of criminal and civil law and cooperation between police and judicial authorities are two of the main features of the Lisbon treaty. A Britain that refuses to take part in this process will be a Britain which loses influence in Brussels rapidly and perhaps irrevocably.

The Tories hate labour law even more than fundamental rights. Mr Cameron wants to go further than Britain's current opt-out from the Working Time Directive in order, presumably, to force the British people to work unconscionably long hours. Isn't a 48 hour working week enough for most people?

All Mr Cameron's proposals taken together add up to a fundamental renegotiation of the terms of British membership of the EU. The package will be completely unacceptable to the UK's EU partners, not least because of their tiresome experience of Mr Blair's 'red lines' during the tortuous negotiation of Lisbon. Mr Cameron must have been advised that the chances of success in this venture are nil. Even to open the process of treaty renegotiation he needs a majority of the 27 states to back him: to close it he needs all 27. (So much for "self-amending"!)

Moreover, the European Parliament now has the power to demand the convening of a constitutional Convention on such a renegotiation - and would surely do so. MEPs also have the power to veto any UK attempt to recast laws in the social and employment field or to give the UK more derogations in justice policy and home affairs. Tory MEPs cannot really help Mr Cameron since, at his bidding, they have cast themselves off from the mainstream conservative Christian Democrats into a small right-wing fringe group made up of eurosceptics from Central and Eastern Europe.

That Mr Cameron's plans for his first term of government will fail at the hands of the EU has not been lost on his critics within his own party. So he has been forced to say what he will do as and when his EU partners do not agree to his demand for a renegotiation of the Lisbon settlement. His answer is truly alarming for the British national interest. Mr Cameron threatens that a second Tory government, after the next general election, will hold a referendum on "a wider package of guarantees to protect our democratic decision making, while remaining a member of the EU". Here the Tory leader strays into fairyland. If Britain's partners will never accept Mr Cameron's first proposals they are highly unlikely to accept his threatened "wider package".

What are we to make of all this? Clearly, Mr Cameron is deeply antagonistic to European federalism. He suffers from the absurd conceit that British ways are



best. He knows little about the European Union, and cares less. He is mendacious in claiming Lisbon says what it does not. He respects neither the rule of law, on which the EU is founded, nor his country's treaty obligations. The fact is that Mr Cameron and his shadow foreign minister, William Hague, have set the UK on track to leave the Union.

#### *Trap for Lib Dems*

Mr Cameron seems to have no doubt that he will win the general election. With Labour in such disarray, he may well be right. But it is not a done deal. For one thing, the Tories remain split on Europe. For another, the first signs of economic recovery may save some of Gordon Brown's bacon. And the prospects for the Liberal Democrats are generally good. Nick Clegg's position in the next Westminster parliament could yet be significant.

So what is Lib Dem policy on Europe? Led by our MEPs, the party has supported the Lisbon process through thick and thin. It was right to drop the previous, facile commitment to

a referendum on the constitutional treaty. The stakes were, and are, too high to deprive the Westminster parliament of its duty to deliberate and decide on Britain's place in the world. Liberal Democrats, of all political parties, know that the problems of the economy, climate and security cannot be tackled by a Britain which is isolated from mainland Europe. The Lisbon treaty is designed to help Britain, and Lib Dems will see that it is used to that end.

But will we have the courage as a party to speak out on Europe in the forthcoming general election campaign? Or will we be tempted to tack with Mr Cameron and chase the populist breeze?

It would, in my view, be a very great mistake for the party to support a policy of holding a referendum on leaving the European Union. For one thing, Mr Cameron's stance has made such a prospect far from abstract. There is a real risk that the Tory government, frustrated by its EU partners and unpopular because of economic policy at home, would play the Europe card and trigger a referendum. Why the Liberal Democrats, Britain's ostensibly pro-Europe party, should want to trifle with such a proposition is beyond me.

#### *Referendums*

Referendums are a crude instrument. They can work to legitimate a regime change when the popular will is clearly for change. Otherwise they are a reactionary instrument, reinforcing the negative, resisting progress. How very seductive, in the recent Irish, Dutch and French referendums, was the siren call: 'If you don't know, say No!'.

Referendums oblige nobody to put up an alternative proposition. They are brutally simplistic, offering less shade of choice than a pub quiz or a consumer survey – with no chance to ask the audience or to phone a friend.

It is misleading, too, to think that a referendum on Britain's European future would actually settle anything. Which side of the emotionally charged debate would give up the fight having lost a referendum? Indeed, would not passions be stoked higher by the referendum campaign itself?

At a time when Westminster is weak and unpopular, the holding of a referendum on Europe would do more terrible damage to the reputation of the British parliament. The recent Irish experience rather suggests that, far from being flattered by the chance to decide the history of Europe, many citizens resented the imposition of such a distracting, complex question on themselves, and were left wondering why the Irish political parties in the Dail were unable to take the decision in an informed and deliberative way.



**Andrew at the congress of the  
Young European Federalists in  
Florence**



**With BBC Politics Show presenter  
Etholie George at the Lib Dem  
Conference in Bournemouth**

I will be criticised for being defeatist, for believing that a referendum on 'in' or 'out' of Europe could not be won. Before aiming such criticism, go and try to convince an average British audience, up and down the country, of the evils of British nationalism and the virtues of European unification. You will find it difficult. You will find the large bulk of the media against you. You will find the vast majority of the public deeply uninformed about the European Union and often very misinformed. You will be shocked by how few of our employers, trades unions, churches or NGOs are prepared to take a positive political stance on Europe. You will live to regret the huge wasted opportunity of the Blair-Brown years to convert the British public to a greater sense of European identity, of purpose shared with our fellow European citizens.

Winning an 'in-out' referendum in Britain is not impossible but it is most improbable. Remember that the (non-Tory) anti-European far right won more than a quarter of the votes in June's European elections. The regular Eurobarometer polls give no cause for comfort about the state of British public opinion. In the latest poll, only 22% of Brits 'trust' the EU - the lowest figure in the Union, and only half that of the next most wary country, France. Only 1 in 3 think that EU membership has benefitted the UK.

#### *Distraction*

Meanwhile, as Britain wallows in its European shallows, the rest of the Union gets on with things. The entry into force of Lisbon will bring about a great quickening of the pace of integration. Better financial supervision at the EU level will be in place by the spring. The effort to complete the single market in services and in intellectual property will pick up again. Binding measures to combat climate change are being put in place. The efforts to build a common foreign and security policy, leading eventually to a common defence, will grow. A big programme in the field of justice and home affairs is currently under negotiation between the European Parliament, Commission and Council.

Britain's political parties would be foolish to stand aside from these developments. Isolationism is not in the national interest. Nor can liberal democracy thrive if trapped within a narrow, nationalist state. Populism, whether of the Tory or Lib Dem variety, means nationalism.

**Assistants Sietse Wijnsma  
and Kathryn Parker in the  
Brussels office**



# Nick Clegg and Me

*East of England intern Kathryn Parker experiences the Lib Dems*

I hadn't quite assigned myself to a particular party when I began my internship with Andrew. I knew that I agreed with the Liberal Democrats on social liberalism and admired the strong environmental values of the party, but actually joining and campaigning seemed like a rather daunting step. The past few months have completely changed my viewpoint. I am proud to be a member of the party and will be out delivering and campaigning, whatever the weather, up to the general election!

The last few months have been very busy. My first taste of an election was the Mayoral by-election in Bedford. I never expected an election to be fun, and accompanied by so much food, drink and good spirits. I was struck by the extraordinary distances people had travelled to help which is testament to the strength of unity within the party. Though I must admit the 'good morning' delivery and a terribly early 4am start was a bit of a shock. The hard work was more than compensated for with the fantastic election result, with Dave Hodgson the new Mayor of Bedford. I was very excited to catch a glimpse of myself on BBC news that evening!

During Dave's campaign, I was lucky enough to attend 'Nick Clegg Meets Bedford'. I was utterly impressed by his extremely articulate answers to questions he took on a broad variety of topics, such as the inclusion of homeopathy on the NHS, deploying more troops in Afghanistan, and why he wants to be prime minister. Meeting Nick soon afterwards I was surprised at how incredibly down to earth and relaxed he seemed given that he'd just spoken to a very large crowd of people.

In November I had the chance to go to Brussels to visit the European Parliament with the Chelmsford Lib Dem group and some of our parliamentary candidates from around the region. The trip was designed to show us how the EU's Parliament worked and the roles of the Council and Commission. We were given a tour of the Parliament and even sat in on a committee – although had I the choice I may not have picked fisheries as the committee to see!

The sheer scale of the Parliament was incredible and logistic nightmare of accommodating the different languages of the member states was sorted by everyone wearing headphones and listening to the translated speaker in their native language. It was also good to find out about how EU funding is used to support universities, infrastructure and charities in the East of England. With so much anti-European feeling within the UK, I think it paramount that the public understand that the money paid to be a member of the EU is returned and invested well.

By chance we were still in Brussels on the historic day that Václav Klaus signed the Lisbon Treaty which made the trip all the more special and gave everyone an excuse to celebrate on our final evening.

I also attended the yearly Norfolk County Council scrutiny committee with Andrew. This was a chance for councillors and members of the public to fire questions at MEPs. It was most interesting when questions divided the MEPs, such as whether our membership of the EU is value for money and what the EU's role in tackling climate change should be. Indeed the UKIP MEP party contested the idea that man-made climate change was occurring at all.

I have hugely enjoyed the last few months and feel incredibly lucky that I've been given this opportunity especially because my gap year has coincided with the general election.



# Liberal People for Liberal Policies

*Andrew is rapporteur for the Parliament on the election of the new European Commission*



**Andrew with the Yes campaign in Dublin's O'Connell Street during the Irish referendum campaign**

As soon as the Lisbon treaty issue was settled, various senior appointments were made. José Manuel Barroso was confirmed as President of the European Commission for a second five-year term. Herman Van Rompuy, the Belgian prime minister, becomes the first 'permanent' President of the European Council. He is a modest and skilful man who will use his many years of experience in Belgium's complex political scene to good effect in his new job.

Catherine Ashton, who replaced Peter Mandelson as EU Commissioner responsible for trade policy in 2008, shot up to the elevated position of 'High Representative' for foreign and security policy. She remains in the Commission, becoming its senior Vice-President. Ashton and the other 25 Commissioners-designate are now subjected to public hearings and the approval of the European Parliament in a process borrowed from – but less cruel than – the US Senate.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) has done very well in the appointments to the Commission, having eight members belonging to sister parties of the UK Liberal Democrats from Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Holland, Ireland, Slovenia and Sweden. The socialists have only six (including Lady Ashton), with the rest going to the conservative European People's Party (including Mr Barroso). The new far-right Tory group will have no Commissioner.

## *Five year programme*

ALDE Members of the European Parliament will use the hearings of the candidates for the new Commission to insist on a political programme for the European Union over the next five years.

The first priority is to address the economic weakness of Europe in the increasingly competitive global market. This requires a radical review of the EU's economic and financial system. There must be much closer coordination of macro-economic policy, not least within the eurozone where lax fiscal discipline threatens to undermine monetary stability and economic performance. Individual efforts by European governments to come out of recession have spawned contradictory policies.

A reformed EU budgetary system needs to be transparent, accountable, buoyant and progressive. Derogations, including the UK rebate, should be discouraged if they cannot be eliminated. EU fiscal measures that establish a direct link with the citizen should be considered, such as a carbon tax. The EU's budgetary policy

must directly support political priorities, notably measures to combat climate change, R&D and foreign and security policy.

Discussion of the stricter supervision at the EU level of the financial sector is progressing fast. ALDE is lucky to have my British Lib Dem colleague Sharon Bowles MEP as chair of the powerful economic and monetary committee. Even the City of London knows that the old days of light regulation are over. National supervision of banking, insurance and securities markets has not worked. There must be better international methodology at work to expose systemic risk. And those countries having the euro must learn to speak and act as a single entity at the IMF.

In the longer run, it is certain that the Union should be empowered to take measures of counter-cyclical stabilisation and have more authority over the fiscal policies of states, especially those within the eurozone. An EU treasury will be needed with conventional capacity for deficit financing and borrowing, and the authority to issue EU bonds for investment in European public goods.

#### *Active security policies*

International insecurity means that implementation of the Lisbon treaty's provisions for the establishment of a new EU external action service is pressing. This service, headed up by Catherine Ashton, must be given all the necessary means for conducting an active and comprehensive European foreign and security policy.

There should be early moves to create the core group of politically willing and militarily capable member states committed to forging a common defence policy, the pooling of military spending and the incremental integration of defence capabilities. Such EU armed forces should be put at permanent disposal of the UN. NATO's struggle in Afghanistan suggests that the old ways are insufficient.

The deployment of all the new instruments and assets afforded by the Lisbon treaty to the development of common policies in justice and interior affairs is needed in order to meet the demand of citizens and states for better security and stronger protection of civil liberties and fundamental rights. A common EU asylum and immigration policy is urgent.

Lastly, we need to reform the electoral procedure of the European Parliament in time for the next elections in 2014 so that a certain number of MEPs are elected from trans-national lists for an EU-wide constituency. This change will promote the rapid development of the European political party system and personalize and politicise the election campaign, thereby strengthening the link between the citizens, the Parliament and the European executive, and promoting European democracy.



**Greeting Irish voters with Liberal  
MEPs Guy Verhofstadt and Pat  
The Cope Gallagher**



**With Alan Dean (Saffron Walden) and Sal Brinton (Watford) at the East of England Lib Dem reception in Bournemouth**


**Andrew (right) bird watches at the Anglian Water reservation at Rutland Water, where new wildlife habitats are being created to mitigate the effect of increased drought and water abstraction.**

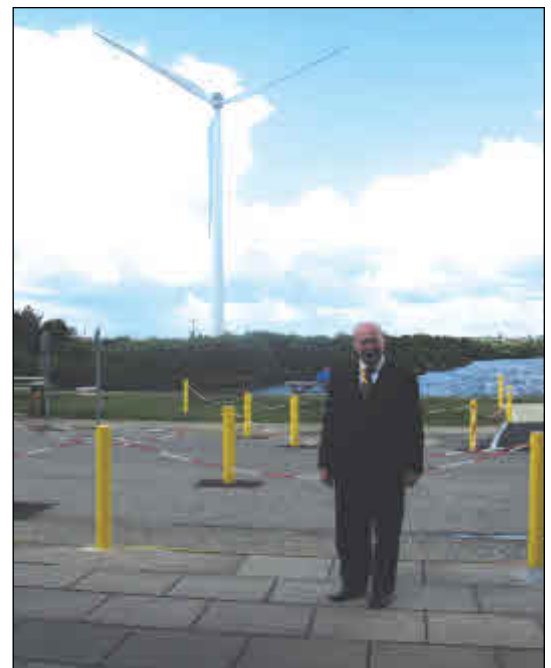
**Below right, Andrew visits the McCain potato factory at Whittlesey, in the Fens, where energy conservation has become a key priority.**

**Both projects are good examples of the direct effects of EU law in the region.**



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**eastern Agenda**  
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