

eastern Agenda

Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP
no. 10 Summer 2004

Good Progress in Difficult Times

Andrew Duff reflects on the election campaign



Andrew Duff and Charles Kennedy on the stump in Norwich

East of England Liberal Democrats made good progress in the European Parliamentary elections on 10 June.

I was re-elected in a higher position than in 1999, with more votes on a larger turnout. (Tim Huggan writes inside with more details).

Both our main opponents lost votes and seats. The Tories sacrificed one disgraced MEP, and are now down to three out of seven (compared with four out of eight in the previous Parliament).

Labour lost its second MEP. Unfortunately the United

Kingdom Independence Party not only retained their former Member, but gained another.

The relative success of both the pro-Europeans (us) and the anti-Europeans (UKIP) shows that English public opinion is becoming much more polarised on Europe. The parties who did least well out of the campaign were the Tories, who want the UK to stay inside a weak European Union, and Labour, whose government has lost its way in Europe.

Within the region, the Lib Dems did best where we were able to brand ourselves convincingly as progressive pro-Europeans. Where we shirked the European battle, our vote stagnated or sunk. It is clear where we will do best in the general election next year.

It is worth recalling that we only did as well as we did because we fought very hard and spent a lot of money over the whole East of England. The centralisation of much of the literature was clearly a success. The dedication of my fellow candidates was marvellous. As our no. 2 on the list, Chris White deserves congratulations as well as commiserations. The campaign team of Ian Horner (agent), John Souter (printer), Tim Huggan (press officer), and Steve Marshall (casework) deserves special praise.

And very many thanks to all those hundreds of Liberal Democrats throughout the region who worked hard to achieve good progress in such difficult circumstances. It is a wonderful privilege to be able to continue to serve the party as your Euro MP.

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Five More Years

Andrew Duff calls for boldness in the new Parliament

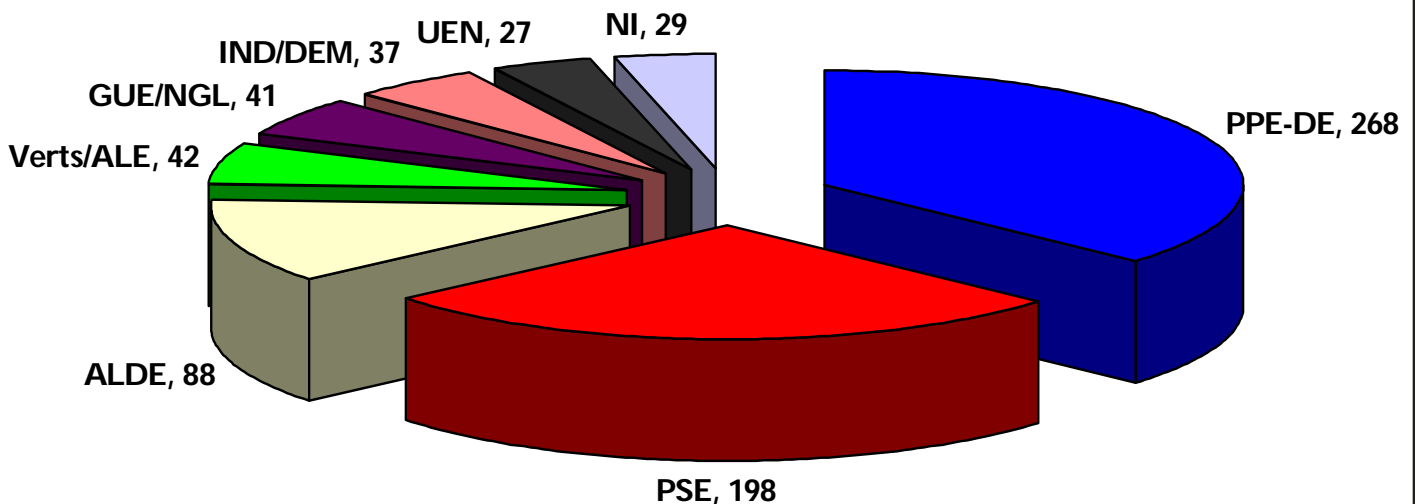
The new European Parliament assembled in Strasbourg on 20 July. It is larger and more eclectic than ever before: 734 members as against 626 in the last Parliament, drawn from twenty-five member states. The modest electoral gain made by the Liberal Democrats in Britain (up to 12 MEPs from 10 in 1999) has been reflected by a good Liberal vote elsewhere. Our parliamentary group has grown from 52 MEPs to 88, including a sizeable delegation from France. And we have changed our name from the cumbersome European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Group (ELDR) to the slightly more meaningful Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

The Liberal candidate for President of the Parliament was Bronislaw Geremek, who played such a prominent part in the Polish Solidarity movement. He won a respectable 208 votes against the combined candidate of the conservative European People's Party and Socialists, Josep Borrell. Borrell, a Spanish socialist who will serve for half of the five year life of the Parliament, made his name in the European Convention which drafted the new Constitution.

I have been re-appointed to my previous positions of Liberal spokesman on constitutional affairs and Vice-President of the joint committee of the European Parliament and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (In politics, one recalls, it is really not so bad to keep one's job!). I have also been made a member of a new committee which will deal with the emerging common security and defence policy of the Union.

There is continuity, too, in my staff team. In Cambridge, Tim Huggan will remain head of the constituency office, Steve Marshall continues in charge of casework, and I maintain my support for Ian Horner, who is also employed by the regional party, Bob Russell MP and the national campaigns department. In Brussels, Guillaume McLaughlin, who fought the elections as fifth on the list, remains my senior political advisor. Roland Fleig, who was my excellent German assistant for the past nine months, is replaced by Rafael Jimenez-Aybar, a Spaniard, who used to work for the Italian Radicals.

THE POLITICAL MAKE UP OF THE NEW PARLIAMENT



Conservative MEPs sit in the EPP-ED group, Labour with the PSE, Lib Dems with the ALDE, and UKIP with 'Independence and Democracy'.

BRINGING THE CONSTITUTION INTO FORCE

The new Parliament has an exciting political agenda. The first, and for me main, objective is to get the new Constitution ratified and brought into force.

Only a week after the elections, I was present at the IGC (Intergovernmental Conference) of heads of government that at last reached agreement on the Constitution. It was an historic step forward and a great advance for those who believe in European unification.

I have given my first reaction to the constitutional settlement as evidence to the House of Commons inquiry on the matter (see my web site or by request). Those who want to read a lot more about the process and outcome of the Constitution will have to wait for my book!



Andrew campaigning at the Luton Mosque

Beyond the Constitution, however, there's plenty more to do. We still have to complete the single market, especially in the field of services, and to press forward with reform of the common agricultural and fisheries policies. This autumn MEPs will return to two crucial pieces of EU legislation on chemicals and software patenting. Romania and Bulgaria have yet to complete their preparations for EU membership: then the Parliament has to decide whether to accept them.

A key decision of December this year will be whether to open accession negotiations with Turkey. Croatia is now keen to join, and others may not be far behind. In this context, the quarrels over the financing of the Union's budget will be neither easy nor quick to resolve.

There's a big round of multilateral trade negotiations to get going, led by Britain's new European Commissioner Peter Mandelson. The stalled Kyoto process has to be energised and revised if the world is to have any chance of managing climate change.

The new Constitution will give the EU real powers to forge a common foreign, security and defence policy. Our first item of business is Iraq: can we help the US and UK extricate themselves from that country in even half decent order? What contribution can the EU make to help NATO find a new and credible role? How does Europe use its authority to stop nuclear proliferation and to combat disease and poverty, especially in Africa?

These are large and complex questions requiring serious political responses that are clearly beyond the reach of any one single European country. My bet is that, in ten years' time, we will all be wondering why individual countries ever had 'national' foreign policies in the first place.

A NEW COMMISSION

The July session of the Parliament also elected José Manuel Barroso, the Portuguese prime minister, as Romano Prodi's successor.

The new President of the Commission has, quite rightly, emphasised the importance of stimulating Europe's economic recovery. After some deliberation, the Liberal group in the Parliament supported Barroso's appointment and will support him in his economic policies too. This means impending economic change for every member state, including the UK. Despite extraordinary home-grown complacency about the British

economy, sterling's interest rates are more than twice as high as those of the euro and Britain's balance of payments deficit is the worst since the eighteenth century. Britain works longer hours than most mainland countries and, in general, achieves lower levels of productivity. Which of us, going abroad this summer, has not enjoyed lower prices?



BBC TV News from
Ipswich

For Liberal Democrats the challenges are these. Immediately, we face a long and difficult campaign to persuade the British public why it is in their interest to be part of a stronger and more democratic Europe, and to convince them that the new EU Constitution will contribute to that end.

In the East of England, we must capitalise on our advances in this year's European and local elections to get more seats in the House of Commons.

On the back of an economic recovery in the eurozone, the debate about sterling's membership of the single currency will be reignited. For the sake of the long term prosperity and stability of the country, we have to win the euro argument.

Within the East of England, Liberal Democrats must become the champion of those who want a more coherent and competitive region. We need not be shy of our message.

Parliament's new priorities

Following this year's enlargement of the European Union to twenty-five member states and the formal agreement on the Constitution in June, the political agenda for the next five years looks like this:

- ratification and entry into force of the Constitution;
- completion of the single market in order to achieve greater competitiveness;
- development of common policies in the fields of justice and security;
- projection of a coherent role for the EU as a global partner;
- accession of Bulgaria and Romania, and progress towards membership for Croatia and Turkey;
- revision of the medium-term financial plan.

The latter item will prove especially controversial for the United Kingdom. Current EU spending is running at 1.14 per cent of the EU's Gross National Income (GNI). The outgoing European Commission of Romano Prodi is proposing an increase to 1.24 per cent for the period after 2007. A minority of national governments, including the UK, has proposed restricting future spending to 1 per cent of GNI.

The British government advocates severe cutbacks to existing spending programmes. As there are already long-term unbreakable commitments to the Common Agricultural Policy, it would be R&D programmes and the 'structural funds' that suffered. The Labour government is indeed proposing that the UK should no longer benefit from EU regional development or social funds. To recap, this would mean foregoing the East of England's £ 96 million investment to meet the challenge of industrial decline (Objective Two) as well as £ 184 million of EU money to combat structural unemployment (Objective Three). The huge potential for the region's universities and hi-tech firms to profit from EU research programmes would also be in jeopardy.

Liberal Democrats - at all levels - should oppose the government cuts. We will return to this issue in the next edition of *eastern Agenda*

Dutch Liberals fight on

Sophie in 't Veld MEP writes about the elections in the Netherlands

The most remarkable feature of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections in the Netherlands was the turn out: nearly 40 per cent as against less than 30 per cent in 1999. The three countries (UK, Netherlands, Finland) with the lowest turn out in 1999 all experienced improved participation in 2004. In the Netherlands the increase may be attributed to various factors. The Dutch took over the presidency of the EU Council for six months in July, and there was a sudden and unprecedented interest from the media in that. The imminent Constitution and, of course, Iraq remained high on the news agenda. The breach of the Stability and Growth Pact by Germany and France provoked a highly critical reaction from the Dutch government, fuelling speculation on what sort of deal the Dutch can expect to get from the EU's new spending plans (almost certainly at Britain's expense!).

Like in the UK, the Dutch campaign was marked by a distinctly Euro-sceptic tone. Euro-scepticism was a novelty in the traditionally very pro-European Netherlands. Some parties were overtly anti-European, but the mainstream parties as well had a very negative message. All parties equally called for 'a different Europe', 'less Europe' and 'limits to Europe' - slogans that do not exactly reveal a great deal of enthusiasm. Only my party, D66, ran an explicitly pro-European campaign. Our campaign posters featured a cow (its black spots in the shape of Europe) and the slogan 'Booing is easy', criticising Euro-scepticism. But in the prevailing Euro-sceptic climate a new party *Europe Transparent* of Paul van Buitenen (the whistleblower whose actions triggered the resignation of the Commission in 1999) was able to win two seats.

The campaign received much more media interest than any previous European campaign. Local and sectoral media reported on the campaign from January onwards, whereas the national media covered the campaign extensively on a daily basis during the last weeks. There were three major televised debates on the national television channels.

Although as usual national issues played an important role in this campaign, this time the campaign was a fairly European one. The debate focussed on some specific issues such as the possible membership of Turkey, public transport, non-discrimination policies, safety and health at work, the EU Constitution, relations with the US, and insecurity.

Both the Dutch liberal parties counted losses. The VVD lost two of its six seats, and D66 lost its second seat. As always, government parties were penalized a bit, though D66 remained stable compared to the general elections in 2003. The VVD undoubtedly suffered from two political scandals less than a week before the elections, whereas an opinion poll on the eve of polling day predicting the complete disappearance of D66 almost certainly cost us a lot of votes.

All in all 15 parties competed for 27 seats in the European Parliament (31 seats in 1999: the Netherlands lost 4 seats following enlargement). They will all be back campaigning soon for the Dutch referendum on the Constitution. D66, like the Lib Dems in Britain, will be in the vanguard of those shouting YES!



Sophie in 't Veld is the new MEP for the Dutch 'social liberal' party D66. She worked formerly for the ELDR group in the Committee of the Regions.

D66 is one of two Liberal parties serving in the current Dutch government. The other, more conservative and larger, is VVD.

Another step forward for the Lib Dems

Tim Huggan reports back on the recent Euro election campaign



The classic pose: Andrew Duff, Menzies Campbell, Kathy Pollard and David Howarth

The European elections were good for the Liberal Democrats. The party gained an extra two seats to add to its tally of ten that it won in 1999. We gained a representative, Fiona Hall, for the first time in the North East of England, as well as our first ethnic minority parliamentarian in Saj Karim in the North West. This was against a background of a deeply Eurosceptic press and a reduction in the overall number of UK seats for election from 86 to 77.

The Tories, on the other hand, dropped from 36 to 27 seats, while Labour were reduced from 28 to 19 seats. Every region of England, as well as Scotland, now has a Liberal Democrat MEP.

In the East of England, Liberal Democrats celebrated the re-election of Andrew Duff with an increased vote and in a higher position (fifth rather than sixth) than in 1999. A 3 per cent swing from UKIP to the Liberal Democrats would have seen Chris White elected as the second Liberal Democrat in the European Parliament in place of the misnamed Tom Wise.

Across the region we greatly strengthened our performance in our key seats. Topping the poll in Cambridge and Watford means that David Howarth and Sal Brinton, respectively, are on course for Westminster at the next General Election.

The campaign that the Liberal Democrats ran here in the East was based on well-attested Liberal Democrat principles and methods adopted at local and Westminster level. We focussed on the message that Liberal Democrats elected would give this region better representation in the European Parliament. Andrew Duff was quite right to insist that his pro-European convictions were not masked in the campaign or suppressed by defeatism from national HQ. Charles Kennedy is a big supporter of Andrew's unequivocal position on Europe.

THE TOP 10 LIBERAL DEMOCRAT VOTES BY DISTRICT

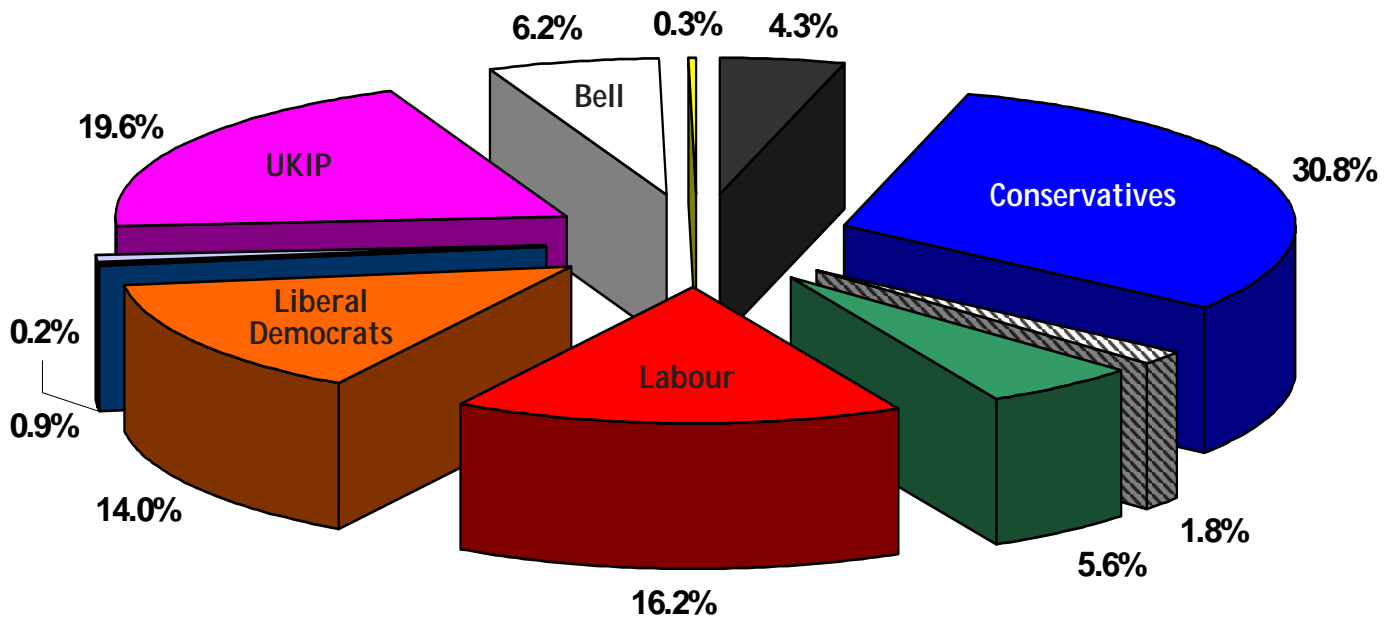
Watford	25.83%
Cambridge	25.82%
North Norfolk	22.12%
St. Albans	21.07%
Three Rivers	20.38%
South Cambridgeshire	19.31%
Norwich	19.14%
South Norfolk	18.34%
East Cambridgeshire	17.38%
Luton	17.16%

A variable election address was planned so that all multi-person households in the East got at least two separate pieces of literature during the campaign. Our key seats issued third election addresses and four-page tabloids. The quality of our election addresses, newspapers and the part-printed literature on offer to local parties was better than ever before. (The Post Office did itself no favours, of course, in being unable to deliver the election material efficiently.) There are lessons to be learned, however, about how we use posters in a PR campaign.

All the hard work paid off with very good results in those constituencies which needed a springboard for next year's general election. Apart from our key seats, we are also particularly well placed in Chelmsford West, Norwich South, St Albans, South Norfolk and South West Hertfordshire.

The clear message that has come out of the European election campaign is 'where we work we win'.

The Election Result in the East of England



	<i>VOTES</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>CHANGE</i>	<i>MEPs ELECTED</i>	<i>CHANGE</i>
Conservative	465 526	30.8%	- 11.2%	3	-1
UKIP	296 160	19.6%	+10.7%	2	+1
Labour	244 929	16.2%	- 9.3%	1	-1
Liberal Democrats	211 378	14.0%	+ 1.9%	1	nc
Bell (Ind)	93 028	6.1%			
Green	84 068	5.6%	- 0.7%		
BNP	65 557	4.3%	+ 1.6%		
English Democrat	26 807	1.8%			
Respect	13 904	0.9%			
Naisbett (Ind)	5 137	0.3%			
Pro Life	3 730	0.2%			
Turnout	36.73%				
Votes Cast	1 510 224				

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A European election campaign is no different from any other, in that we have to be seen out on the doorstep, delivering the literature, putting up posters, and engaging the public in serious debate right up to and throughout polling day itself.

New trip to Brussels



The new Lib Dem MEPs in London with Charles Kennedy

Another regional visit is being organised to the European Parliament in Brussels for Monday 6 - Tuesday 7 December. There is a modest subsidy for expenses, as well as advice about transport and hotels. The event is being specially designed for MPs, peers, PPCs and leading councillors.

The delegation will join parliamentary committee meetings and the ALDE Group in the Parliament as well as having a briefing from the European Commission and the East of England Office. Competition for places is high: please contact Tim Huggan as soon as possible if you wish to know more details.

East of England Liberal Democrats Reception



Bournemouth Conference

All Liberal Democrat members are invited to attend the East of England Reception at the Federal Party Conference in Bournemouth

Venue: Cork Ballroom, Tralee Hotel, Bournemouth

Date: Sunday 19th September

Time: 20:00

Contacting Andrew

Orwell House
Cowley Road
Cambridge CB4 0PP
tel 01223 566700
fax 01223 566698
mep@andrewduffmep.org

Andrew Duff MEP

European Parliament
rue Wiertz
B-1047 Brussels
tel 00322 284 7998
fax 00322 284 9998
aduff@europarl.eu.int

 LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

www.andrewduffmep.org

Regional Conference in the East of England

Saturday 30th October

starts at 11.00

at Luton Sixth Form College,
Bradgers Hill Road, off Old Bedford
Road, Luton LU2 7EW

Registration details 01485 540 289

or contact Tim Huggan at the
Cambridge office using the details
opposite

eastern Agenda

ea@andrewduffmep.org

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