

eastern Agenda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP
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Now Britain must decide

Andrew Duff reports on the European Constitution.



After the historic vote at Strasbourg, Graham Watson MEP (leader of ALDE), Inigo Mendez de Vigo MEP (EPP), Parliament President Josep Borrell, Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Jo Leinen (PES) and Andrew Duff.

On 12 January the European Parliament voted by 500 votes to 137 to support the new Constitution of the European Union. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe were a key part of the huge cross-party coalition that backed the historic reforms. The British Tory MEPs joined the UKIP and the far right (and the far left) in voting against the Constitution.

The Constitution's opponents, although noisy and half-crazed, have no single alternative to offer. UKIP wants Britain to leave the Union altogether. The Conservative Party wants us to stay in and 'renegotiate' the terms of membership. The weakness of the Tory position is that they would find nobody to negotiate with. The Convention which drafted the Constitution achieved a re-foundation of the Union. The radical arguments were had then and have now been settled. The constitutional deal is done. Britain's partners believe that they have already made enough concessions to the UK in the drafting of the Constitution by way of derogations, emergency brake clauses and abnormal procedures. A nationalist government in Britain has no chance whatsoever of diluting the force of the Constitution, weakening the Union or rendering opaque what is now to be transparent. The fact is that a future Tory government, or a Labour government weakened by a referendum defeat, would have to settle for second-class membership of the EU.

In the referendum campaign, now expected for spring 2006, the combined pro-Constitution forces of the Lib Dems and Labour must blow the Tories apart. The challenge is to get the government to raise its game.



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TEN REASONS FOR VOTING YES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution:

1. Makes the European Union more legitimate. It modernises its system of government and enhances its capacity to act effectively.
2. Clarifies the purpose of the Union and refines its values, principles, objectives and powers. It makes the Union more efficient, streamlining and rationalising decisions.
3. Greatly reinforces European parliamentary democracy. The European Parliament becomes co-legislator with the Council in all normal circumstances. National parliaments get increased powers to scrutinise EU draft law.
4. Makes the EU budget more democratic. MEPs will exercise full budgetary control over all EU spending.
5. Makes the Commission more accountable to the Parliament.
6. Makes the Council more transparent. Debates and votes will have to be in public when laws are being passed.
7. Puts the citizen at the heart of the integration process. The Charter of Fundamental Rights becomes binding on the EU and on member states when implementing EU law and policy.
8. Allows the Union to stand on its own feet in world affairs. The new EU Foreign Minister, heading a single diplomatic service, will formulate and represent its interests on the global stage.
9. Boosts solidarity among member states in cases of natural disasters or terrorist attacks.
10. Allows one million citizens to initiate an EU policy proposal.

NEXT STEPS

In future editions of *eastern Agenda* we will keep you up to date with the preparations for the Yes campaign in this country and in the progress of the ratification process in every other member state.



Richard Corbett MEP, Labour's spokesman, launching the Yes campaign with his Liberal counterpart Andrew Duff at Strasbourg.

So far, only three countries – Lithuania, Hungary and Slovenia – have ratified the Constitution. Twenty two to go In February I am off to Madrid to campaign for a positive vote in the Spanish referendum.

For those who want to play a leading part in the campaign in your area, do consider joining LDEG – the Lib Dem European Group. We enclose a leaflet explaining more about LDEG, and how you can join.

WEBSITE

Our website - www.andrewduffmep.org - will be an easy way to connect with the official Yes campaign and other useful sites.

Tim Huggan is keen to get feedback from members about the website. Do you have ideas for its improvement?

EU-Turkey talks hit headlines

In France and the Netherlands, both facing referendums before the summer, the question of the EU constitution has got inextricably mixed up with that of Turkish membership.

Not for the first time, dislike of Turks fuels nationalism in Europe. Fear of Islam provokes a Christian over-reaction. Also troubled are those moderate European politicians, committed to the federal path, who worry that perpetual enlargement of the Union will lead to its dilution. For these, the prospect of Turkish membership on top of the recent spate of new members is the last straw.

The European Parliament, refreshingly, set aside such inhibition. In December MEPs voted by 407 to 262 to support the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. In January they voted by 500 to 137 to endorse the constitution. For many MEPs the two controversies combine to define the European identity. They argue that without the strengthening of the EU implicit in the constitution there can be no prospect of admitting Turkey. Most MEPs would concede that the nationalists are at least correct in surmising that no constitution means no Turkey and probably no Croatia (or anywhere else, for that matter).

A European Union enlarged to Turkey without being at the same time deepened by internal reform simply would not work and should not be contemplated. But a large majority of the Parliament has enough confidence in the power of the constitution to ensure that the Union can continue to grow without losing the momentum of integration.

French and Dutch critics of the constitution are confounded by those Turks who complain that the constitutionalisation of the Union unfairly raises the threshold of membership.

Wiser Turkish opinion, however, is content that the constitution does not define the conditions for membership in terms of size, demography or religion but in terms of the values, principles and objectives of liberal democracy. The constitution's geographical criterion that member states should be 'European' should not impede membership for Turkey which not only hosts Europe's largest city but is also tied to Europe by centuries of history and culture. Europe would not be what it is today without the legacy of Turkey.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Moreover, the EU's own process of constitutionalisation demonstrates to Turks that it is not only they but Europeans also who have to modernise their system of government to reflect the needs and aspirations of contemporary society.

Constitutional reform, refurbishment of old institutions, rationalisation of instruments, streamlining of decision-making procedures, redefinition of values and objectives, integration of fundamental rights, combating discrimination on the grounds of race, gender and religion, strengthening the rule of law, separation of legislative from executive powers, bolstering parliamentary democracy, fostering subsidiarity, encouraging decentralisation – these are all part of Europe's current project. They should be part of Turkey's too.



Andrew visits the Suleiman Mosque in Istanbul



Andrew visits the site where St Paul preached to the Ephesians.

Both Turkey and the European Union need to rise to the challenge of globalisation. Europe's constitutional reforms and Turkey's efforts to assimilate those reforms equip them politically to meet the challenge together. Europe's slowly emerging common foreign, security and defence policy will be highly stimulated by the admission of the Turks.

Turkey is a longstanding member of NATO but is no longer a poodle of the USA. Indeed, in refusing to support the American invasion of Iraq, Ankara showed a degree of independence which many British might envy. Turkish membership will extend Europe's reach and responsibilities to the borders of the Caucasus, the Gulf and the Middle East. It is odd for those like the French and the Dutch who have in the past worked for the EU to become a global player now to balk at the chance to achieve that objective.

That is why the majority of MEPs back the opening of Turkish accession negotiations despite the relative hostility of European public opinion. A good start on the campaign to win over public support in Europe would be for Turkey not to haggle unduly over the terms of the marriage contract, but just to get on and enjoy the relationship.

WHAT TURKEY HAS TO DO

Turkey's priority tasks are clear: to grow the economy, to eliminate political oppression and to implement the EU's

acquis communautaire.

Turkey will also have to pass two other big tests before being accepted as genuinely ready for EU membership. The first is to end the civil war against Kurdish separatists. The PKK must be brought down from the mountains and persuaded to abandon the use of arms. Kurdistan separatism must be accommodated somehow within the mainstream of Turkish politics.

CYPRUS

The second hurdle is Cyprus. The opening of accession negotiations is a de facto concession by Turkey that it recognises the Republic of Cyprus, but Turkey still needs to do more to reassure moderate Greek Cypriot opinion that the Annan Plan will work in practice.

Turkey must soon sign and ratify the revised Ankara Agreement to extend its customs union with the EU to all twenty-five member states of the Union. Withdrawal of some troops from North Cyprus, as foreseen under the UN proposals, would be desirable. In return, the European Council must face down Tassos Papadopoulos, the nationalist Greek Cypriot leader, and open up direct trade and investment with Turkish Cyprus.

Turkey will never arrive at its European destination unless and until there is a comprehensive and final reconciliation of Turks, Greeks and Kurds.

The European Union, strengthened by its new constitution, should be ready and willing to help.

Andrew Duff is Vice-President of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee

Brussels in Winter

James Lucas reports on his recent trip to the European Parliament in Brussels. James is PPC for Hertford and Stortford.

Walking around the cobbled and aged streets of Brussels, it is sometimes difficult to imagine the power and influence of the European Union that emanates from this unassuming city. The City's finances don't allow grand aspirations to materialise. And yet move into any bar in the eastern part of town and you hear muttered conversation in a host of accents and see huddled Euro-staff discussing issues that affect 450 million of us every day.

So it was that after a day spent discussing European reform, a group of more than 20 activists and campaigners from the East of England squeezed past small groups of workers to find a comfortable spot for a drink and *moules et frites*.

We had been invited to attend a series of meetings organised by Andrew Duff, East of England MEP, and his Brussels office headed by Guillaume McLaughlin, who had been one of our European candidates last year.

The intention was to get to grips with some of the key issues in Europe today and to understand how we are aiming to make Europe work better. We wanted to prepare ourselves to combat Euro-scepticism and to learn more about the stories we hear of a town where bureaucracy is said to rule and wrong-shaped bananas are banned. Now we were eager to hear from the people directly involved of the issues they face on a daily basis.

And in the main, despite the best efforts of a fairly boring man from the Commission who spoke about Common Agricultural Policy, we did. We were given informative and rational presentations on a range of topics. Debate was encouraged and learning was promoted. Even reform of the structural funds (Objective 2 etc) became, well, interesting.

This is a key aspect of European Union. Jointly funded projects designed to make the weak stronger bring to mind the threads of social responsibility, which hold us together and help us grow. The problems faced by Norway, which sits outside the EU and receives no structural payments, could be a salutary lesson for all who promote a half-hearted relationship with Europe. Norwegians must adopt what the members say if they want to sell their goods and enjoy the benefits of a wealthy market place on their doorstep. But they have no say in how the legislation they adhere to is created. Politics-by-fax is no way to run an economy or, for that matter, a democracy.

These were the issues that struck us as we crowded into an Irish Bar for *un demi* before dinner.

At dinner the mood changed. Presentations turned to conversations, then discussions and laughter. How better to explore and debate issues and common interests than over a drink or two. The recipe for success in European negotiation, perhaps?



James Lucas with Andrew Duff in the European Parliament chamber

Is Europe helping or hindering the software industry?



In the Brussels office, Rafael Jimenez-Aybar and Guillaume McLaughlin review progress with Andrew on the software directive.

When does technical progress become an invention? How truly inventive does it have to be to be worthy of an EU patent? Why won't copyright do? MEPs and ministers are grappling with these issues as the Union tries to make headway on the draft directive on the patenting of computer-related inventions (or software patents, for short).

The number of emails received in Andrew Duff's Brussels and Cambridge offices on this legislation bears witness to its potential impact on the East of England's software industry. Get it right, and the EU will have given a big boost

to our region's competitiveness. Get it wrong and we hand software development over to the Americans. The trick is to strike the balance between the different needs of small and large business - both of which, as Andrew points out, are prominently represented in the region.

In the first reading of the proposal in September 2003, the European Parliament adopted amendments strictly to limit patents to new inventions only and to try to ensure that patentable computer-implemented inventions make genuine technical contributions to industrial application.

The Council of Ministers has taken an age to reach its common position on the basis of the Parliament's first reading. The Council has specifically excluded a computer program, as such, from constituting a patentable invention. The draft law now comes back to the Parliament for its second reading. But small software houses are still suspicious that the EU legislation will bring about a US-style rash of patenting that will stifle European creativity.

As *eastern Agenda* goes to press, the draft directive is still under negotiation. The British government adopts a conservative position. Opinion in the Parliament hardens around a liberal position, supporting the 'open source' software community. Despite the complexity of the legislation, Andrew Duff remains of the view that the establishment of a uniform system of EU-wide patents is necessary in order to create legal certainty and to reduce costs. He has written to Lord Sainsbury, the responsible UK minister, to ask for a full re-appraisal of the British government's position.

STOP STANSTED EXPANSION

East of England Liberal Democrats are supporting the campaign to stop the building of a second runway at Stansted. BAA's proposals, so far encouraged by the government, are based on unsound commercial practices - such as cross-subsidy from profitable Heathrow and Gatwick - and a less than complete understanding of EU environmental and competition policies.

Stansted is already set to grow to some 25 million passengers per year. Only retail and car parking make it a profitable enterprise. No mainstream airline, like BA, is willing to fly from Stansted, and the business needs of the region are not well served by the airport. Andrew Duff, our leading group on Uttlesford DC and the Lib Dems on EERA believe that a decision to build a new runway is unjustifiable given these factors and the general precarious state of the aviation industry.

Liberal Democrats get ready for leap forward in general election

The general election looks set to be called for 5 May. Squabbling between Blair and Brown makes delay harmful for Labour, to say nothing of the forecast downturn in the British economy. As the Tories lose heart at the prospect of their third, and inevitable defeat, they lurch to the right. UKIP is collapsing in bitter infighting. Only the Liberal Democrats are united under the leadership of Charles Kennedy, who is ready to fight a positive campaign for a fair and modern Britain.

In the East of England the party looks forward to re-electing its two existing MPs - Norman Lamb in North Norfolk and Bob Russell in Colchester. We are also targetting our campaign efforts to get David Howarth elected as MP for Cambridge and Sal Brinton as MP for Watford. In several other seats we have good prospects of making significant advances.

FREEDOM, FAIRNESS AND TRUST

The Lib Dems will be fighting all 56 Westminster seats in the East of England. Most candidates are already in place and are attending training days, raising money and preparing literature. All offers of help are greatly appreciated. Members should contact their local party or Tim Huggan in the Cambridge office (tel. 01223 566700).

Andrew Duff is planning to visit all 56 seats in the region during the general election campaign. Parliamentary candidates have already received information about the dates, themes, venues and objectives of Andrew's campaign.



Chris White (chair of the Lib Dem regional campaigns committee), Ed Featherstone (PPC for South West Herts) with Andrew on the stump.

The present state of play between the parties in the region is Conservative 34, Labour 20, Lib Dem 2.

To help **David Howarth** in **Cambridge** call now on **01223 516586** for details on how you can help.



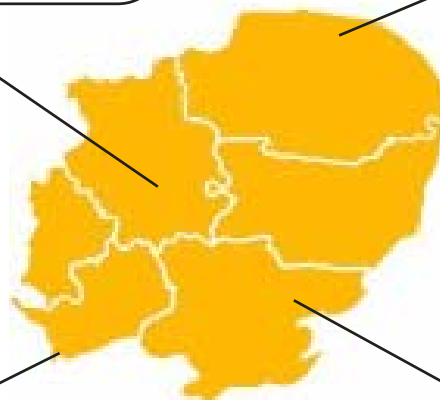
To help **Norman Lamb** in **North Norfolk** call now on **01692 403752** for details on how you can help.



To help **Sal Brinton** in **Watford** call now on **01923 677080** for details on how you can help.



To help **Bob Russell** in **Colchester** call now on **01206 506611** for details on how you can help.





Andrew Duff talks with the RSPB at their HQ in Sandy, Bedfordshire. Vikki Phillips (left) doubles as a Lib Dem City Councillor in Cambridge.

Topics covered included the extensive conservation work of the RSPB in the East of England, the reform of the EU sugar regime, the impact of EU enlargement and the Constitution.

Andrew Duff with Constituency Assistants, Steve Marshall and Jim Brunsten, prior to a tour of the British Sugar Factory at Bury St Edmunds. Andrew has consulted widely with interested parties on the effect of proposed changes to the EU Sugar Regime.



Andrew Duff meets with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust at the opening of their new site at Hopton Fen. Andrew has worked closely with Environmental Organisations in the Region in meeting the UKs targets in the EU Habitats Directive.



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
www.andrewduffmep.org

VOLUNTEER WANTED

Following the departure of Jim Brunsten to Brussels, Andrew Duff MEP is looking for a volunteer with an interest in European Politics and Government to work in Andrew's Cambridge office.

If you are looking to work in the future within the structures of the EU, this is a way to get valuable experience and expertise in European affairs or if you want to devote some time in a busy and active MEP's Office then there is plenty for you to do.

INTERESTED?

Contact Tim Huggan on 01223 566 700 or email tim@andrewduffmep.org with your c.v.

Out of pocket expenses will be paid.

eastern Agenda

ea@andrewduffmep.org

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