

# eastern Agenda



from Andrew Duff MEP  
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## The Convention closes the deal



Andrew speaks at the final meeting of the Convention.

After eighteen months solid work, the European Convention closed on Thursday 12 July. Along with the huge majority of its members, I signed the draft constitution, shook hands with our president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and went off to lunch.

The Convention was a radical departure from the way things are normally done in Europe. It was large, pluralistic and open, combining in its working methods the best of both parliamentary and diplomatic styles. By involving the European Parliament in constitutional reform it broke a taboo. By involving national parliamentarians, the Convention helped to recruit a new generation of MPs to a better understanding of Europe. By involving representatives of candidate states, the Convention proved to be first-class training ground for the newcomers into the wiles and wherewithal of EU politics. By forcing government ministers to justify their positions in public, the Convention was refreshingly subversive.

The Convention was an historic success. The Union's values and objectives, clearly set out, are liberal, democratic and progressive. The

Constitution, which can be found in full at <http://european-convention.eu.int>, has clarified who does what in Europe. It strengthens the capacity of the Union to act effectively at home and abroad. It establishes a single legal personality for the EU, and creates a new post of Foreign Minister - a key reform which should allow Europe to speak with more unity and purpose in world affairs.

European citizenship takes a leap forward, protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights which, despite fierce British opposition, will be binding. The untidy jumble of instruments and decision-making procedures has been streamlined. The huge pile of former treaties and protocols is cut down by about two-thirds.

The Council will take many more decisions by qualified majority voting (QMV), and the Parliament's legislative and budgetary powers have been multiplied. Tortuous arithmetic for establishing QMV has been changed to the simple formula of half the member states representing three-fifths of the population.

The Constitution makes it easier for a core group of member states to go forward faster in any given policy area. The eurogroup is ready and waiting to deepen



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economic integration. In defence, France and Germany want to lead a number of close partners towards the creation of truly integrated European armed forces.

Many bad ideas were suppressed by the Convention. The British effort to recreate a third legislative chamber made up of national MPs was roundly defeated, as was Giscard's own plan for a People's Congress. The UK government's plan for a super-president of the European Council who would supervise the work of the Council and the Commission has been watered down to such an extent that one should not wait for a rush of job applications.

Of course, not everything in the Constitution is perfect. Some good in principle decisions - notably, the separation of legislative from executive functions - were not carried through to their logical conclusion. While almost everyone spoke in favour of more QMV in the Council, many member states brought their own list of exceptions and derogations. Had it not been for the UK, there would have been more QMV in foreign, fiscal and social policy.

It was my privilege to lead the group of representatives from the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR). We were about 30 strong, drawn mainly from national parliaments, but including representatives of four prime ministers. The Convention certainly succeeded in strengthening the ties that bind together our transnational political party.

The UK government, already marginalised because it invaded Iraq, made few new friends in the Convention. Its ministers, parliamentarians and officials at the Convention appeared leaderless and were not trusted. Nobody bored more for his country than Peter Hain. His catechism of 'red lines' drove people to the bar. The British Tories, meanwhile, joined with some Moscow trained anti-Europeans to oppose the consensus.

The British performance at the Convention has given the Constitution an unpropitious reception in Britain. Even the pro-European press in the UK seems uncertain about its significance. The BBC has not climbed out of its Westminster dugout. The *Economist* trashed it. The Europhobic press has gone bananas: the *Daily Mail* declares the constitution to be a 'blueprint for tyranny'. This is anti-democratic and xenophobic stuff.

The outcome of the Convention will certainly be a big issue in next year's election campaign for the European Parliament. Many want a referendum to be held at the same time. The referendum argument is superficially attractive, especially when set against Mr. Blair's dismal cop-out on the euro. But beware. If a British referendum were to fail to endorse the new constitution the reform package would be blocked not just for Britain but for all Europe.

Were the government to accept that the UK does not have a moral or political right to block the constitutional progress for the rest of Europe, a referendum would be an option. But the risks are very great. If our partners chose to ratify the Constitution, Britain would have no choice, in the event of a No vote, but to seek a second-class membership of a Union that had been refounded on a constitutional, federal basis. Not an attractive prospect. No euro, no Constitution, no say in the great decisions which will shape our continent in the twenty-first century.



Norman Lamb MP, Chris White and Andrew Duff MEP look over the edge of the constituency at Happisburgh in North Norfolk.

# Euro-MP candidates chosen

Earlier this year all Liberal Democrats in the East of England had a chance to vote for their candidates for the European Parliamentary elections next June.

In the most democratic of selection procedures, Andrew Duff was re-selected top of the region's list. Accepting the nomination, Andrew said: "I am most grateful to the membership for renewing their trust in me as their Euro MP. There is no other job I would wish to do on behalf of the East of England, the Lib Dems and Europe. I am looking forward to defending my record as the first Lib Dem MEP for the East of England and in advancing Lib Dem policies for Britain in Europe. My top priority will be to lead the party to even greater success. Two MEPs is our goal. Chris White would be a great addition to our team in Brussels and at home."

Second on the list is Chris White, currently our group leader on Hertfordshire County Council and on the Regional Assembly. Chris White, who lives in St. Albans, has built up great expertise about the region, and is a well-known figure in the East of England party. Commenting on the result of the selection, Chris said: "It's a great honour to be so high on the list. I know I can win alongside Andrew if the party works very hard in the election campaign. The Tories do not deserve to have four MEPs in this region."

Kathy Pollard, who is the Lib Dem deputy leader on Suffolk County Council, gained the number three slot on the list. Kathy has been twice the Westminster parliamentary candidate in South Suffolk, and is a keen European.

Fourth is Rosalind Gill, until recently head of Norman Lamb's constituency office in North Norfolk. Like Andrew and Chris, she also fought the last European elections in 1999.

Paul Howell, the former Conservative MEP for Norfolk is fifth. Paul will help to draw many disillusioned Tory voters to the fold. Sixth is Guillaume McLaughlin, who heads Andrew's Brussels office, and is a seasoned campaigner for the European Liberal cause.

Nahid Boethe is number seven on the list, and Cllr Earnshaw Palmer, from Thurrock, is our reserve candidate. (The number of MEPs, currently eight, elected from the East of England will be reduced to cater for the enlargement of the European Union.)

Now that we have in place such a strong team of prospective candidates, our preparations begin in earnest. Local parties are asked to include them in their campaigning, recruitment, social and fund-raising activities. The candidates' diaries are being coordinated by Tim Huggan from Andrew Duff's Cambridge office. Please contact Tim on 01223-566700 or at [tim@andrewduffmep.org](mailto:tim@andrewduffmep.org).



Andrew at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, one of the National Trust's prime assets in the East of England.



From left, Ian Horner (Regional Campaigns Officer), Chris White, Nahid Boethe, Andrew Duff, Earnshaw Palmer, Rosalind Gill, Guillaume McLaughlin, Kathy Pollard, Stuart Marritt (Regional Chair).

# Liberals in the Lords: spotlight on the region's peers

*Sixty five peers take the Liberal Democrat whip in the House of Lords, of which sixty are life peers and five are hereditary. Five of these Liberal Democrat members of the Lords live in the East of England. In this issue of eA we have asked them to talk about their work in the House.*



Andrew Duff with Shirley Williams, with whom he co-wrote the book 'European Futures'.

## **RT HON. BARONESS WILLIAMS OF CROSBY**

Shirley Williams is one of the most instantly recognisable figures in British and European politics. She was elected as the Labour MP for Hitchin in 1964-74 and for Hertford and Stevenage 1974-79. Harold Wilson appointed her Secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection in 1974. She was Secretary of State for Education and Science in the Callaghan government of 1976-79.

One of the original gang of four who founded the SDP, Shirley won the famous Crosby by-election in November 1981. She was narrowly defeated at the general election of 1987 in Cambridge. As President of the SDP she played a central role in the merger with the Liberal Party in 1988, and was created a life peer in 1993.

Her academic career culminated in becoming Professor of Elective Politics at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard in 1988. She succeeded Bill Rodgers as Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Lords in 2001.

Respected across the House for her clear mind and trenchant style, Shirley is one of the foremost political figures of her generation.

Shirley Williams is married to Dick Neustadt, and lives in the lovely fold of Hertfordshire between Stevenage and Bishop's Stortford. She is President of the East of England Liberal Democrats.

## **BARONESS SCOTT OF NEEDHAM MARKET**

A Suffolk County Councillor, Ros Scott was no. 2 on the Euro list in 1999. She writes: "My portfolio in the Lords includes local and regional government, transport and planning, and keeps me pretty busy! We have just finished the Regional Assemblies Referendum Bill which paves the way for potential directly elected regional assemblies.

"I am currently busy with two new pieces of legislation, the Local Government Finance Bill and the Rail and Transport Safety Bill. Ever since becoming involved in local government have taken a keen interest in road safety issues and will be attempting to persuade the Government to bite the bullet on the drink drive limit and lower our limit to that in the rest of Europe. I'm also going to be pressing the government on reviewing speed limits in rural areas, and looking at heavy goods vehicles in the countryside."



Ros Scott, the party's local government spokesperson in the Lords.

## **LORD ADDINGTON**

Dominic Addington, the 6th Baron, who lives in Norwich, is on the policy committee of the regional party. He writes: “It was at the age of 22 that I entered the House of Lords after taking my father’s title, becoming the youngest serving peer. I have used my youth to my advantage in the chamber, particularly during the Student Loans Bill.

“However, it wasn’t until I graduated from the University of Aberdeen that I became an active member of the Lords. I took the position of sports spokesman in 1993, and have also been disability spokesman since 1994.

“Having dyslexia has encouraged me to lend my support to the British Dyslexia Association and take the position of Vice-President. I am also Vice-President of the UK Sports Association and I am a keen rugby player. I am captain of the Commons and Lords Rugby and Football team, and have played in two Parliamentary World Cups competitions in 1994 and 1999.”

## **LORD PHILLIPS OF SUDBURY**

Andrew Phillips OBE was made a life peer in 1998. A Cambridge graduate, he has fought five parliamentary elections. About his career in the Lords he says: “My preoccupation with the relationship between the citizen and the State draws me particularly to Home Office affairs, to European Union democracy matters, and to support local autonomy.

“Currently, I am fighting the Courts Bill insofar as it centralises the running of Magistrates’ Courts. We have already won three votes. I am also part of a strong Liberal Democrat team of peers resisting those aspects of the Communications Bill which treats cultural goods like baked beans, and allows further concentration of media ownership.

“The Labour government’s besotment with market force values and centralisation truly mystifies me.”

## **LORD McNALLY OF BLACKPOOL**

Tom McNally, who lives in St Albans, was Political Adviser to Prime Minister James Callaghan, 1976-79. Elected Labour MP for Stockport in 1979, he was a founder member of the SDP in 1981. He writes: “For me the Communications Bill has dominated the Parliamentary Session coming to a close. This is the Bill which empowers the new super regulator Ofcom. It is important because it sets the framework within which all out electronic communications systems from radio and television to mobile phones and the Internet will work. It deals with both the technologies and the content of our media.

“The Liberal Democrats fought long and hard to strengthen the position of the citizen and the consumer against crude market forces. Real improvements were made to the Bill in defence of our culture and our democracy from powerful global media conglomerates by insisting on strong content regulations and distinctive regional content for both television and radio.

“Often against a united Labour and Conservative alliance it was the Liberal Democrats who argued for quality, diversity and choice in our broadcasting and genuine plurality both in source and expression for news services in particular.”



Dominic Addington leads in the Lords on disability issues.



Andrew Phillips, a leading solicitor, was Jimmy Young’s ‘Legal Eagle’.



Tom McNally, active campaigner, at the end of a charity bicycle ride for Cancer Awareness.



Andrew campaigning in South Norfolk, where the Liberal Democrats successfully retained control of the Council.

# Good progress in local elections

*Tim Huggan writes on the outcome of this years local election results in the region*

The Liberal Democrats now have more councillors in the East of England than Labour. This was the main outcome of this year's local elections. We made 66 net gains on the night and now have 611 councillors to Labour's 589. Liberal Democrats are in overall control of seven councils.

Breakthroughs in North Norfolk, Uttlesford and Watford demonstrate that we are making headway against both Labour and the Tories. In addition, we comfortably retain control of Cambridge, Norwich, South Norfolk and Three Rivers.

The taking of Uttlesford from a Tory led coalition was the result of many years hard work from the team led by Alan Dean. The Lib Dem group shot up from 18 to 31 members, making our Uttlesford group, in the Saffron Walden constituency that includes Stansted Airport, the largest Lib Dem group in the region.

Close on their heels, is Norwich City where we now have 30 councillors led by Ian Couzens in this former Labour fiefdom. Next year's elections in Norwich, when all councillors are up for election on new ward boundaries, will be a supreme test of our sustained advance against Labour in Norfolk.

David Franks led the party to an astonishing victory in Luton, where the Lib Dems took 20 seats and have assumed minority control. This is the first unitary authority where we have been in such a happy position. Peterborough, Southend and Thurrock watch out! Their loss at Luton means that Labour now controls just three councils in the region (Ipswich, Stevenage and Thurrock).

The list of councils where the Liberal Democrats improved the number of elected members is impressive: Babergh, Bedford, Braintree, Broadland, Cambridge, Colchester, Dacorum, Hertsmere, Ipswich, King's Lynn & West Norfolk, Luton, Mid-Beds, North Herts, North Norfolk, Norwich, South Norfolk, Southend, St Albans, Tendring, Three Rivers, Uttlesford and Watford.



Andrew visits Wood Walton Fen, a major part of English Nature's attempts to preserve some of the original Fenland.

Our councillors' task is to prove that in our new found areas of influence across the region they are better than our opponents not only at listening to people but also at implementing our priorities decisively. Lib Dem Councils should work to develop the regional dimension of local government, and to actively promote themselves in Whitehall and Brussels. This is a challenge, indeed, for all our councillors across the region.

Next year the local and European Parliamentary elections will be held on the same day, Thursday 10 June. This gives us a great opportunity in the places where there are council elections to push up the turnout of our voters. Even where there are no council elections in 2004, the European Parliamentary poll will be counted and declared locally, so every local party has an incentive to work hard on the ground. The national and regional parties are working hard to prepare a fully integrated campaign that will deliver us an increased share of the poll, more councillors and two MEPs.

# Yes to the euro

*East of England's Liberal Democrats overwhelmingly backed euro membership in the survey included with the last edition of eastern Agenda. Tim Huggan reports back.*

In the days following the New Year, the Cambridge office was inundated with replies from our members' survey on the euro and EU matters. The survey was collated and analysed by the end of February. We promised that we would report back in this issue.

Over a thousand responses were received, plus a handful of objections to the methodology.

The question on future UK membership of the euro elicited many detailed responses and requests for more information which have been answered by Andrew on an individual basis. The survey showed a large majority in favour of euro entry, with a clear majority favouring immediate entry. **58%** said we should join now, with a further **18%** saying they supported joining in principle. The rest were divided between **13%**, who said they did not know enough about the issues to make an informed decision.

Just **11%** of Liberal Democrat membership in the East of England said that the UK should never join the euro. We had been told that Lib Dems are more euro-sceptic than the party leadership. This survey suggests that this is not the case.

Questioned about the reasons for joining, **75%** of our membership thought that Britain's trade would grow, while **69%** welcomed increased British influence within the EU.

Of those opposed to the euro, **88%** feared loss of control of the economy.

## *Views on the Union*

The membership was fairly divided between those that thought that the European Union had too much power (**36%**) and those that thought that it had too little (**45%**). A clear majority, however, thought that they would like to see the European Parliament with more power (**70%**). The Court of Justice was also a popular choice for more having more authority (**62%**). Not surprisingly, there was little enthusiasm for giving greater powers to the Council of Ministers (**14%**).

## *Keeping You Informed*

We asked you on what issues you would most like to be kept informed about. The environment with **61%** came out top, followed by the euro on **53%**. Given the crisis over Iraq, many asked for more debate about common foreign, security and defence policy.

The survey was a useful exercise in gauging what our members think about Europe and the euro. Liberal Democrats in the region generally have a positive view of the EU and of its component institutions.

Andrew certainly takes account of the views of the party membership when addressing the political and constitutional issues raised in the Convention. We plan to repeat and refine this survey in due course.



Andrew on a recent visit to Perkins Engines at Peterborough. Caterpillar, Perkins' parent company, recently called for early UK entry into the euro in order to safeguard its manufacturing base in the UK.

**76%**  
**say**  
**YES**



Andrew chairs a meeting of the Liberal caucus of the Convention in Barcelona.



Andrew visits Southend Airport as part of his investigation of the SERAS report which raised the option of three extra runways at Stansted. He has called on the government to drop the proposals.



Andrew meets with the NFU at Newmarket where the CAP mid-term review and biofuels featured on the agenda. The NFU recently came out strongly in support of early British entry to the euro.



Andrew signs the Constitution. Jean-Luc Dehaene, former Belgian prime minister, looks on.

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**Andrew Duff MEP**

**VISIT BRUSSELS WITH THE EURO-CANDIDATES, MPs, PEERS AND OTHER LEADING LIGHTS OF THE REGIONAL PARTY.**

**Tuesday 4 - Wednesday 5 November.**

Some places still available.

Top class briefings with MEPs and officials from the Commission and the East of England Office. Observe ELDR Group and Parliamentary Committee at work.

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