

eastern **A**genda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP
No. 19 Summer 2008

Ireland says No

Andrew Duff reflects on the Irish referendum and its consequences



Andrew joins the Yes campaign in Dublin

As all the world knows, on 12 June Ireland rejected ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon by just under 110,000 votes.

Nobody who campaigned there, as I did, could have been surprised by the result. The pro-treaty campaign, led by the government, was late and lacklustre. Few politicians or business leaders were able to argue the case for Lisbon with conviction or credibility. On the anti-treaty side, a toxic cocktail of Sinn Féin, ultra-Catholics, greedy farmers, US-style neo-cons and traditional British eurosceptics united to spin all sorts of stories about the iniquities of Lisbon, few of which coincided with veracity. There was no control of spending in the campaign, and the ragbag of non-parliamentary opponents were given equal time and space in the media to that of the mainstream supporters of Lisbon.

As in all referendums, people recognised their chance to act opportunistically, without obvious consequences to themselves or, indeed, to the government of Ireland. The future of Europe, or the fact that Ireland has profited hugely from EU membership, barely featured.

Ireland is a conservative place where nationalist identity is strong. 'Neutrality' against Nato and Anglo-US imperialism is much admired. That the Treaty of Lisbon will greatly strengthen the European Union's efforts to reach a common



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foreign, security and defence policy certainly contributed to its rejection in Ireland. It is said that the Irish are too courteous to talk about corruption in high places, but they will vote against it. Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's trial for embezzlement was unhelpful. The Irish are also too polite to speak openly about their hostility to immigration, but many clearly fear and dislike it. These three factors – neutrality, corruption and immigration – appear to have played a large part in turning voters against the Lisbon Treaty.

So, too, did the fact that, under Lisbon, the size of the European Commission is to be reduced. Under a system of equal rotation, after 2014, each state will lose a Commissioner once in every fifteen years. This was found to be particularly detrimental to the interests of Ireland and other small states.

It was striking, too, how many people simply resented the fact that they were being asked to take a decision on a long, complex and in many ways obscure document that they had no intention of reading. 'If you don't know, vote no' remained a powerful populist theme throughout the campaign – along with the beguiling, but totally untrue belief that there was somewhere a hidden (and superior) Plan B.

Whatever the reasons for the Irish no, the result is devastating for the European Union both internally and externally. It has stalled in a dramatic way the efforts of the EU, going back several years, to settle its constitutional future. European parliamentary democracy has suffered a big setback. Plans to make the governance of the Union more efficient and transparent are put on hold. And the EU will not yet enjoy the greater role in international affairs that is prescribed by Lisbon. Global leadership in climate change will be hard to assert. Progress in building common policies in justice and home affairs, including asylum and immigration, will be delayed. Further enlargement of the membership of the EU beyond Croatia is now impossible.

Whatever next?

The problem is that no changes to the current EU Treaty of Nice can be made without the agreement of all 27 member states. Elsewhere, ratification is, both honourably and sensibly, taking place by parliamentary means. It is proceeding well, including in the UK, where the Queen signed the ratification Act on 19 June. That same day, Mr Brian Cowen, the Irish prime minister, came to Brussels to explain himself to his fellow heads of government. He has been given until the next meeting of the European Council in October to come up with a proposal to salvage the treaty.

The British Conservatives and UKIP are arguing that the Irish people in their plebiscite have spoken on behalf of everyone else. That is a strange attitude from people who usually bore on about the inalienable sovereign rights of the Westminster parliament. It also looks odd in Ireland, where British right-wingers are not seen as the natural champions of Irish liberty.

For although Ireland has a legal veto on the Treaty, it can be doubted whether it has either the moral authority or the political clout to prevent the rest of the Union going ahead with the reforms which are, rightly, considered to be both urgent and essential. This might not seem very fair, but it is very realistic.

Ireland can, of course, wield its veto if it wishes to do so, plunging Europe into an even greater and more prolonged crisis. More sensible Irish opinion, however, will back a government that both seeks to re-establish a consensus on Europe at home and comes up with a compromise that will be acceptable to its EU partners. Mr Cowen is right, therefore, to urge all member states to express themselves constitutionally on the fate of the Treaty of Lisbon. At the time of writing, seven have still to do so.

All being well, there will be an agreement in October not to implement the provision of the Lisbon Treaty to reduce the size of the Commission. (Fortunately, the clause in question allows for the European Council, acting by unanimity, to use its discretion in this matter.) Besides this one substantive change, a number of interpretative, but non-binding, declarations can be added to



Irish Liberal Pat Cox leads the Yes campaign

the Treaty clarifying various points of concern to Irish public opinion. These would include the retention of Ireland's right not to participate in EU security and defence policy, the maintenance of its veto against EU harmonisation of corporation tax policy, and the continuing obligation on Irish women in want of an abortion to make the journey to England. Such a package would be put to a second referendum in Ireland as soon as possible.

We will surely need some contingency plans in the event of a second Irish no. At the very least, the consequences of refusing to reform and strengthen the European Union should be made very plain both to Ireland and to its partners.

As constitutional spokesman for the Liberals in the European Parliament, I should at least be kept busy. Other considerations apart, these complex issues look set to dominate the run up to the European Parliamentary elections on 4 June.

May Day circus

Tim Huggan reports on this year's local government elections

Council elections were held in several districts on 1 May. The big news was that Liberal Democrats gained control of St Albans. And we retained control of Cambridge, Three Rivers and Watford. We made major gains in Colchester (+ 4), but took a beating in Norwich (- 5).

The overall result for all the parties was:

Conservative	+ 24
Labour	- 20
Liberal Democrats	- 4
Greens	+ 4
Others	-1

Next year the situation becomes more complicated. There will be county council elections in Cambridgeshire, Essex and Hertfordshire. The two new unitary authorities in Bedfordshire (Bedford and Central Beds) will have their first election.

Uncertainty reigns in Norfolk and Suffolk, where unitary authorities are being planned. It is unlikely that either county will have elections in 2009. And we know that there will be no elections in the existing unitaries of Luton, Peterborough, Southend and Thurrock.

The big one is the European Parliamentary elections, now scheduled for Thursday 4 June. It is likely that the local polls will be shifted to take place on that day.

At present the East of England enjoys three Conservative MEPs, 1 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 UKIP and 1 Independent (ex-UKIP).

The European campaign will be much in evidence at the Liberal Democrat federal party conference in Bournemouth, 13-17 September, and the regional party conference in Huntingdon on 11 October.



**St Albans Lib
Dems celebrate
with Nick Clegg**

The truth about MEPs' expenses

Andrew Duff explains how an MEP earns expenses

There has been much speculation in the British media about the official allowances available to an MEP and about how individual Members treat their expenses.

Much of this press activity was sparked by the revelation that a Tory MP employed his son to do nothing and that Westminster MPs get a 'John Lewis allowance' to furnish their London homes. Yet the transfer of the story to the European Parliament was also aggravated by the existence of a report from the Parliament's official auditor revealing that a very small number of MEPs were suspected of pocketing their secretarial allowances.

So to put the record straight, here is what I received in 2007. By the way, all these details are on my website www.andrewduff.eu.

First, MEPs get a general expenditure allowance towards their office costs. In 2007 this was £31,929. This went towards paying for my Cambridge office, communications, and travel on constituency business. Here is a summary of the account:

General Expenditure 2007		
1	Office Expenditure	£
1a.	Office Rent & Rates	12,382.94
1b.	Postage	1,885.49
1c.	Stationery	1,798.79
1d.	Publications	2,121.42
1e.	Subscriptions	381.38
1f.	Insurance	342.50
1g.	ITC	769.81
	Sub-Total	19,682.33
2.	Communications	
2a.	Office Phone	1,621.10
2b.	Mobile Telephone	4,996.95
	Sub-Total	6,618.05
3	Transport	
3a.	Car	4,300.00
3b.	Train	440.80
	Sub-Total	
4	Other	
4a.	Party Conference	744.90
4b.	Other	154.30
	Sub-Total	899.20
	Total	31,940.38

Second, MEPs get expenses for their travel between home and their place of official parliamentary business (Brussels, Strasbourg or elsewhere). This is paid at a flat rate based on kilometrage. There has to be proof of actual travel. Last year, I received €62,917.

Third, MEPs get a daily allowance to cover subsistence and accommodation costs when away on official business. In 2007 the rate was €279 per diem. I received €48,406 – which means I ‘signed in’ on at least 173 days. There is no European Parliamentary version of a ‘John Lewis list’, and no specific second home allowance.

As far as staffing is concerned, I employ two full time assistants in Brussels and the equivalent of two in Cambridge. My total staff bill plus their expenses for 2007 was €179,801. Staff are employed directly by the Member, but the contracts of employment are lodged with the Parliament.

At present, MEPs salaries are the same as, and completely fixed by, those of Members of the respective national parliament. From July 2009, when the Parliament’s next term begins, significant reforms have been agreed. There will be a common salary for all MEPs – mysteriously set at 38.5 per cent of the wages of a judge at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Tax, insurance and pension schemes will also be rationalised. And travel reimbursement will be brought closer to the actual costs incurred.

Reform

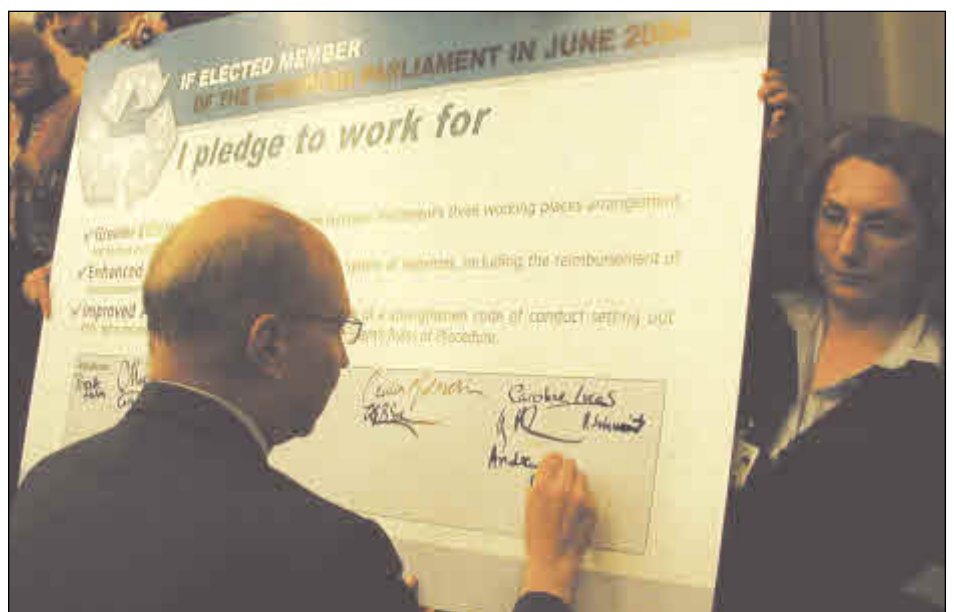
There are still negotiations going on about how to deal with the employment of assistants. We are working towards agreement on an assistants’ statute which will satisfy the Belgian tax authorities and provide a common pay scale and conditions for all MEPs’ staff. It has been agreed to ban the employment of family members.

The changes in train will greatly simplify the present system in which twenty seven different employment and taxation laws apply. The huge disparity between the salaries of the richest MEPs (from Italy) and the poorest (from Lithuania) will disappear. Equal pay for equal work is not without its problems, however. MEPs from Italy and Germany face a big pay cut, while in many central European states MEPs will be earning much more than their prime ministers.

Nevertheless, official financial control of what goes on is getting much better. UK Lib Dem MEPs have agreed to have their own accounts checked by an accountant, and to improve the way we present ourselves to the public on our websites. For our latest guidance note on accountability, see www.libdemmeeps.eu.

But to get rich quick, don’t become an MEP.

Try being a judge.



Andrew has campaigned consistently for a more transparent system of expenses

The peril and the hope

On 7-11 May 1948, Winston Churchill presided over a Congress of Europe in The Hague. This was the first gathering of European democratic politicians since the end of the War three years earlier. Several hundred people converged on the Ridderzaal, at the heart of the Dutch capital. They included many pre-war prime ministers as well as the future German and French leaders Konrad Adenauer and François Mitterrand.

The Congress agreed the following 'Message to Europeans'. It is the founding document of the European Movement, and led in the following year to the foundation of the Council of Europe and, in 1950, to the launching of the European Coal and Steel Community. Exactly sixty years later Andrew Duff joined other European leaders in The Hague to commemorate the courage and foresight of the founding fathers, and to reflect on what has been achieved as well as what might still be.



To see Mr Churchill on line, go to www.europeanmovement.org

MESSAGE TO EUROPEANS

Europe is threatened, Europe is divided, and the greatest danger comes from her divisions.

Impoverished, over laden with barriers that prevent the circulation of her goods but are no longer able to afford her protection, our disunited Europe marches towards her end. Alone, no one of our countries can hope seriously to defend its independence. Alone, no one of our countries can solve the economic problems of today. Without a freely agreed union our present anarchy will expose us tomorrow to forcible unification whether by the intervention of a foreign empire or usurpation by a political party.

The hour has come to take action commensurate with the danger.

Together with the overseas peoples associated with our destinies, we can tomorrow build the greatest political formation and the greatest economic unit our age has seen. Never will the history of the world have known so powerful a gathering of free men. Never will war, fear and misery have been checked by a more formidable foe.

Between this great peril and this great hope, Europe's mission is clear. It is to join her peoples in accordance with their genius of diversity and with the conditions of modern community life, and so open the way towards organised freedom for which the world is seeking. It is to revive her inventive powers for the greater protection and respect of the rights and duties of the individual of which, in spite of all her mistakes, Europe is still the greatest exponent.

Human dignity is Europe's finest achievement, freedom her true strength. Both are at stake in our struggle. The union of our continent is now needed not only for the salvation of the liberties we have won, but also for the extension of their benefits to all mankind.

Upon this union depend Europe's destiny and the world's peace.

Let all therefore take note that we Europeans, assembled to express the will of all the peoples of Europe, solemnly declare our common aims in the following five articles, which summarise the resolutions adopted by the Congress:

PLEDGE

- (1) We desire a United Europe, throughout whose area the free movement of persons, ideas and goods is restored;
- (2) We desire a Charter of Human Rights guaranteeing liberty of thought, assembly and expression as well as the right to form a political opposition;
- (3) We desire a Court of Justice with adequate sanctions for the implementation of this Charter;
- (4) We desire a European Assembly where the live forces of all our nations shall be represented;
- (5) And pledge ourselves in our homes and in public, in our political and religious life, in our professional and trade union circles, to give our fullest support to all persons and governments working for this lofty cause, which offers the last chance of peace and the one promise of a great future for this generation and those that will succeed it.

Linda Jack tells Eastern Agenda what attracts her to EU politics

What motivates me to be a politician?

As a child, growing up in Luton, I often found myself sticking up for anyone I thought was being treated unfairly. This is a characteristic that has stayed with me throughout my life, often to the chagrin of my opponents!

As a teenager I joined the army, working as an analyst in Special Intelligence. This led to my first attempt at collective bargaining. Once my Commanding Officer blamed me for 'inciting the girls' to mutiny!

Once a student, I became President of the Student Union. After teaching for a short while I transferred to youth work and have spent most of my life working with marginalised young people in diverse communities, both urban and rural. That work can make a real difference to the life chances of young people and to give them a voice.

I have also seen the contribution European Union funding has made over the years to regeneration and opportunities for young people.

I became chair of Unison's Youth and Community Workers Committee, engaging in negotiations at a national level on their behalf. I also served as branch secretary of Bedfordshire County Council Unison Branch. I was frustrated by both a certain level of collusion (which I can't abide) and complacency.

As a Liberal Democrat I was elected to Bedford Borough for 5 years, local party chair for two years and was the parliamentary candidate for Luton North in 2005. I currently sit on the International Relations and Federal Policy Committees of the party. My ambition is to be a Member of the European Parliament.

I am inspired by the values that underpin our party, and by my Christian faith. I have been very involved in the Stop the War Campaign and am a trustee of the Elijah Trust, a charity working with the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.

Our MEPs can be a strong voice for our region and our party in Europe. I am frustrated that the debate focuses on what is wrong with Europe rather than the benefits we have all accrued. As a party we have sometimes shirked from even talking about Europe. We should be far more positive about our role in Europe, as well as working from inside to change things we don't agree with.

We are living in very difficult times. The US approach has badly backfired. The EU approach, based not on threats but on the rule of law and in creating viable communities, is best placed to tackle climate change or terrorism.

The European Parliament promotes these values well. It has a good story to communicate.



Linda Jack (2nd right) campaigning in Brentwood during May's local elections



The campaign goes to Thurrock



Richard Brickwood shows Andrew the Cambridge Gliding Club. The future of gliding is threatened by the expansion of Stansted Airport.



Andrew Cann, Lib Dem Group Leader on Ipswich Borough Council in front of the statue of Sir Bobby Robson in Portman Road



Watford Grammar School for Girls on a recent day trip to Brussels, via Eurostar - one of many visitors' groups welcomed to the European Parliament by Andrew.

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Bournemouth Conference
Question Time with Lib Dem MEPs

Sunday 14th September
6.15pm - 7.30pm
at the Bournemouth Conference centre

All welcome



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