The Foreign Policy Centre

RECONNECTING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND ITS PEOPLE

Edited by Adam Hug

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Acknowledgements

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About the authors

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Our Key Recommendations

This pamphlet seeks to make a positive contribution to the debate about how to improve public awareness of the work of MEPs and the European Parliament while making wider changes to the system to build a stronger connection with the electorate. Our headline recommendations are:

- **Fundamentally reform the electoral system.**
  The editor advocates the introduction of a Mixed Member Proportional system that creates individual local constituencies and ensures proportionality through a national top-up list.

- **Connect better with the Media.**
  Expand the capacity of the European Parliament's UK media team to engage editors, train MEPs' staff and get parliamentarians into the regional media.

- **Bring the debate to UK Parliaments.**
  Use rights under the Lisbon Treaty to strengthen UK Parliamentary scrutiny of EU draft legislation. Encourage individual Select Committees to look at EU legislation more regularly, strengthen cooperation between parliaments through COSAC and improve working with MEPs.

- **Make the European Parliament more credible.**
  Further reform expenses by requiring receipts for MEPs' general allowance spending and bring an end the migration to Strasbourg. Enable MEPs to nominate the Commission President and veto the appointment of individual Commissioners. Make debates more lively!

- **Talk about the European Parliament in schools.**
  Explore putting information about the European Parliament in the Key Stage 4 Citizenship curriculum.

- **Use civil society groups to reach their members**. Improve the Parliament and MEPs engagement with key stakeholders in the voluntary sector, business and local government while strengthening the Citizen's Initiative and Agora processes.

A full list of recommendations is available at the end of the pamphlet.

Introduction:
'Do you know who your MEPs are?'
by Adam Hug

"When has the European Parliament ever been connected to the people?"
An oft-heard refrain from our four public seminars

This pamphlet is the culmination of a year-long Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) and European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom project that sprang from the blank incomprehension expressed by many of the editor's friends and relatives to the seemingly simple question," Do you know who are your MEPs are?"[1].

The editor would like to make clear from the outset that, both from the findings of the seminar series and from his own observations, the vast majority of the responsibility for this failure cannot be lain at the door of MEPs themselves. From experience most MEPs[2] are hard working and highly capable legislators, toiling diligently, not only to shape EU legislation, but also to represent their constituents in the Parliament and the Parliament to their constituents. However, the system in which they operate is flawed and in need of urgent reform to ensure that the European Union's only directly elected institution gains an enhanced democratic legitimacy from an electorate who are starting to understand more about who and what they are voting for.

This pamphlet brings together contributions of from some of the European Parliament's leading experts and its some of its key UK stakeholders. The introduction and conclusion seek to add to the mix some of the findings of the London, Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff seminars, the results of two surveys and some additional observations that are all

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[1] This project and pamphlet has primarily focused on the connection between the British public and the European Parliament and while some of its recommendations may have EU relevance it does not claim to be a comprehensive approach to the situation in all countries.
[2] There are always going to be some exceptions in any institution.

focused on one important task: strengthening the connection between UK MEPs, the institution in which they sit, and the public that elects them.

What the surveys told us

In the most recent Eurobarometer survey of EU attitudes, 82% of UK voters said that they had heard of the European Parliament as an institution compared to a Union-wide average of 89%.[3] However in Britain, only 25% of voters said they trusted the European Parliament when compared to an average of 50% across the EU, with 19% unable to answer. What the survey did not address was whether those who had heard of the Parliament actually knew anything about it, something that may contribute to the low trust rating. Data on awareness of MEPs is hard to come by, however a 2005 MORI Scottish civic participation survey placed knowledge of the work of MEPs at the lowest of all elected representatives, with only 7% claiming to know a fair amount or more about the work of their MEPs[4].

To improve our understanding of the issues at hand, the Foreign Policy Centre conducted two surveys that help inform this pamphlet: a general survey of public awareness and attitudes towards the European Parliament and a snapshot of MEPs casework and their views on the mechanisms used to elect them to office.

The FPC received 67 responses to the general survey, filled in at the seminar or submitted online. Strenuous efforts were made to reach as wide a range of people as possible with the survey, however, the very act of being at a seminar where forms were available, going onto the FPC website, or receiving it by email from the stakeholder lists compiled by the FPC and assisting organisations such as the

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[3] Eurobarometer 72, Public Opinion in the European Union, Autumn 2009
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_uk_uk_nat.pdf
[4] Stephen Hope and Susan King, Public Attitudes to Participation, MORI Scotland
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/57346/0016708.pdf

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) or the Citizenship Foundation, does mean that respondents were likely to have an atypically high knowledge of the issues compared to the general population. Their backgrounds were varied, with 15% from the voluntary sector, a further 15% were teachers or academics, 19.5% were students, while 7.5% were civil servants and business people respectively. While 46% of respondents had never been to a public meeting on European issues prior to the FPC-Commission event they may have attended, 45% were members of political parties. Therefore this is a relatively small sample of a broadly politically engaged set of people rather than a blind poll of the general public. Nevertheless, the results are still useful as a guide because, despite these important caveats, the level of knowledge respondents display about the European Parliament and the level and nature of its engagement with them is worryingly low.

Only 31%[5] of respondents could remember a positive news story about the European Parliament or MEPs since the June 2009 elections, but 61% of respondents could remember a negative news story. 81% could not remember a story in their local news that featured any of their local MEPs, with only 6% positively saying that they had seen such a report.

On the critical question of whether these respondents could correctly identify the MEPs that represent them in the European Parliament, only 12% could correctly identify all the MEPs in their region[6], while 30% were unable to name any of them. Two thirds were unable to remember half or more of the MEPs in their region. The highest number of MEPs that this relatively well informed group of respondents could correctly name was five. Consider then the difficulties faced by MEPs in the UK's largest regions such as the South

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[5] This figure did rather unkindly include someone who noted Nigel Farrage's plane crash as a positive story.
[6] It should be noted that for this section alone, the 14 responses from our meeting at the Welsh Assembly have been removed as all four MEPs were sat in front of them. Also, unhelpfully 2 respondents answered yes to the question without giving any indication of which ones or how many, so this is an assessment of 51 responses.

East (10 MEPs) where it is unfeasible that all but the most obsessive constituent could accurately remember everyone who represented them in the European Parliament. For a comparison amongst the general public voter recognition of their local MPs ranges from 44-52%[7] and it would be likely that almost all of our respondents could name their representative at Westminster.

On the question of whether respondents had received any direct communication from their MEPs since the June 2009 election, it seemed instructive to separate the responses from people who were members of political parties and those who were not. Of the party members, two thirds had received something from MEPs by post or email while 81% of non-party members had not received anything from their MEPs.

MEPs and their constituents

Twelve UK MEPs very kindly provided the responses to our short survey. On the first question regarding interaction with constituents, the findings confirmed one of our main concerns; that the nature of representing large regions would deny MEPs one of the key tools used by their national counterparts to interact with their constituents- surgeries. None of the respondents were able to hold constituency surgeries where they could, one on one, discuss issues of concern and assist ordinary people with problems.

When trying to assess the number of local people who directly contact their offices, the results tended to come in two batches. The question had asked MEPs to estimate roughly the volume of correspondence received from constituents in their region each week and to fill in approximate weekly totals for letters, emails and other approaches (telephone and fax) - quite a challenge. Eight

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[7] IPSOS MORI, Public Knowledge of their Member of Parliament's Name, March 2010
http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2662&view=wide

MEPs suggested that they received between five and twenty letters per week, while four put that figure at 100. Similarly, the same eight MEPs gave a relatively even spread of values from 12 emails per week through to 100. The remaining four gave estimates of 350, 1000 and two of 600 emails per week. For telephone calls, faxes and other communication, again seven of the previous group of eight MEPs estimated between one and 25, while three[8] gave a figure of 100, with the remaining two giving figures of 200 and 400.

There are two possible reasons for this bunching. Firstly, that the latter four MEPs have a much higher profile and therefore more contact from their electorates, however and secondly, it is also possible that when estimating they did not factor in that the request was regarding contact by constituents and included correspondence with other stakeholders beyond their region. Certainly, if we can conclude that the responses of the 8 MEPs are giving a more accurate picture, then it can be argued that, perhaps unsurprisingly, they have a lower caseload than experienced by many Westminster MPs despite there being around nine times the number of MPs as MEPs. This can be attributed in part to the strategic and technical nature of MEPs' legislative role, but also that they cover regional rather than local constituencies, making it more difficult for the public to engage with them on issues of local importance in the way that MPs regularly do[9].

In one regard, our survey information on electoral system preference can be bolstered by the observations of the seven MEPs and one former MEP who participated in our seminars. It should not compromise the anonymous nature of the results to say that in the survey, and at the public seminars, it was possible to detect an entirely understandable correlation between some MEPs preferred

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[8] Including one MEP who had been in the lower group for the letters and emails.
[9] Much of MPs caseload is strictly speaking in the actual remit of local councillors but they see it as an important (or unavoidable) part of their job representing their constituents to seek to solve these problems However former MEP Elspeth Attwooll observed that most MEP's casework does not address EP matters.

electoral system and the one most likely to get them elected in their specific areas. Of those who did respond to the survey, there was a small majority who preferred a Single Transferable Vote STV to the current system and a small majority against Open Lists and a return to constituencies compared to the status quo. When given a free hand to select any system, five MEPs selected STV, four chose an unspecified constituency model, two chose the current system and only one selected the academics' favourite option of an open list system.[10]

The nature of the debate

While Dr Christian Kaunert and Kamil Zwolski's essay in this pamphlet addresses some fault lines in the academic debate on the European Parliament, it is important to look at some of the other attempts to address this important problem. The European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee is exploring these issues at present with UK MEP Andrew Duff acting as Rapporteur on a report looking at amending the EU's Electoral Act. The report[11] focuses on the transnational challenges of operating an electoral system for all EU citizens, however it usefully notes that on average there is a 25% discrepancy between national and European elections across the EU and concurs with this author's assertion on constituency size, noting that 'voters tend to identify best with smaller electoral districts'. It also recommends the compulsory use of a preferential semi-open list system, which is discussed later on.

One of Duff's more controversial recommendations is the creation of 25 EU-wide MEPs. While in the long-term a supranational tier of MEPs might encourage greater public

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[10] It is worth noting former MEP Richard Corbett's objections to open lists in his article to understand why MEPs do not favour such system.
[11] Draft Report on a proposal for a modification of the Act concerning the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage of 20 September 1976 (2010/XXXX(INI)), April 2010, European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Affairs, http://www.andrewduffmep.org.uk/resources/sites/217.160.173.25-406d96d1812cb6.84417533/European%20Parliament%20Electoral%20Reform/Draft+Report+European+Parliamentary+Reform.pdf

understanding of the nature of European politics if it was matched by, or if it precipitated, a step-change in the nature of media coverage of European issues, however it would do little in the short-run to bring EU politics closer to people who would be unlikely to know who or what they were voting for. Furthermore, such a proposal would move the EU further towards a more federal model for which there is limited appeal, either amongst the UK public or its political leaders.

The Foreign Policy Centre's previous contribution to the debate 'Reforming the European Parliament'[12] was drafted by two MEPs in 2003. While then Dutch MEP Michiel Van Hulten now works for PR firm Burston Marsteller, the other author has gone down a different path to become the UK's Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP. They argued that the European Parliament's approach to policy-making can be too technical and insensitive to the political implications of the proposals it considers and made a number of recommendations about improving the operation of the Parliament. One of their key recommendations was to strengthen the links between the European Parliament and national parliaments, something the Deputy Prime Minister is now in a position to drive forward. They proposed measures such as enabling MEPs to attend Select Committees on a model similar to that used in the Netherlands and the creation of a joint committee of MPs and MEPs. They also called for a transfer of some funding for media engagement from MEPs and the Parliament to the offices of political groups to help foster media debate on EU political issues. Their paper also advocated replacing the current closed lists with open lists, having toyed with an idea for introducing, somewhat topically in today's political context, a standardised Alternative Vote system across the EU.

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[12] Nick Clegg and Michiel Van Hulten, Reforming the European Parliament, May 2003, Foreign Policy Centre, http://fpc.org.uk/publications/ReformingEuroParl

Professor Simon Hix of the LSE has written prodigiously on the Parliament and his paper with Sara Hagemann[13] addresses one of the key areas for this project, the electoral system employed for European Parliament elections. They argue, sadly with some accuracy, that European Parliament elections have 'failed in any meaningful sense to create an 'electoral connection' between European citizens and the politics in the European Parliament'. They point out that European elections are used as second-order contests on national political issues and parties[14]. They argue that European Parliament elections, due to their transnational proportional nature, rarely lead to dramatic shifts in the political balance and therefore do not result in major movements on policy, making it rational for parties to focus on national issues. Their solution would be to further increase the Parliament's powers and political impact. They believe that the introduction of open lists in constituencies of 4-10 MEPs would help, over time, to increase the connection between the public and their MEPs. Hix's broader work on the EU's democratic accountability 'What's wrong with the European Union and how to fix it'[15] includes proposals to create a 'winner takes more approach' to assigning chairs of Parliamentary Committees and creating one fixed five year term for the Presidency of the Parliament, thereby creating a bonus for the electoral success of pan-European parties.

Eurosceptic think tank Open Europe produced a wide-ranging report[16] on the European Parliament in the run-up to the 2009 elections. Perhaps influenced by the expenses scandals engulfing Westminster at the time of its publication, it focused on MEPs' well documented problems

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[13] Simon Hix and Sara Hagemann, Could changing the electoral rules fix European Parliament elections?, version updated in 2009, LSE, http://personal.lse.ac.uk/hix/Working_Papers/Hix_Hagemann-Can_EP_Elections_Be_Fixed-14Jan09.pdf

[14] The editor concurs having participated in campaigning during European Parliament elections with materials comprising crime and economy messages

[15] Simon Hix, What's wrong with the European Union and how to fix it, 2008, Polity Press, Cambridge

[16] The European Parliament - What does it do and how does it affect your everyday life?, Open Europe, April 2009 http://www.openeurope.org.uk/research/europeanparliament2009.pdf

with their own remuneration and allowances, calling for greater transparency, cuts to MEPs' pay and an end to the second pension. It also made the case that consensus politics was a voter turn-off and made wider political points about what it perceived to be over-intrusive policy-making that relates more to taking decisions at EU-level rather than the legitimacy of the Parliament per se.

What our contributors say

As a former MEP, European Parliament expert and now Cabinet member for the President of the European Council, **Richard Corbett** brings a unique perspective to the challenges the institution faces in engaging with the public. He writes about the changing nature of the institution and the problem of low turnout. He argues that while smaller constituency sizes may increase proximity to voters, open lists could be confusing, divisive and encourage celebrity campaigning, while transnational voting would create a more remote tier and is unlikely to be accepted. He believes there should be a greater connection between the Parliament and the election of the Commission and calls for further reform of expenses and allowances.

Dr Michael Shackleton, one of the leading academic experts on the Parliament, who now leads the UK Office of the European Parliament, believes that the Lisbon Treaty will lead to the emergence of a different kind of EU where there is greater public debate about its future direction. He highlights the European Parliament's use of the new powers available to it under Lisbon through substantive amendments to financial services legislation and vetoing the Commission's agreement with the US over bank data. He addresses the new powers for national parliaments to examine Commission proposals' compliance with the subsidiarity principle. Shackleton also tackles some of the challenges involved putting the Citizen's Initiative million signature process into practice.

Providing a perspective from the UK voluntary sector, **Liz Atkins**, former Director of Public Policy at NCVO, makes the case that civil society engagement can help bridge the gap between a remote EU and its citizens. She believes recent constitutional wrangling is a turnoff for voters and highlights three areas for progress. For her, Lisbon's creation of the Citizen's Initiative and its Article 11 requirements for dialogue with civil society are welcome. The European Parliament's Agora process should become annual and be strengthened by engaging civil society more in setting the agenda, choosing the topics and drafting final statements.

Making the case on behalf of the UK's small and medium sized businesses, **Dr Adam Marshall**, Director of Policy and External Affairs at the British Chambers of Commerce says that the European project is a mystery for most of his members. He says very few businesses are in touch with their MEPs. He praises MEPs' legislative grasp compared to their Westminster colleagues but believes they are less comfortable talking to the media and using virtual communication. The amount of time spent in Brussels and Strasbourg combined with large constituencies makes MEPs feel inaccessible to business and calls for local Chambers of Commerce to help bridge the gap.

Looking up, figuratively speaking, from local government and representing the Local Government Association (LGA), **Cllr Flo Clucas**, a leading member of the Committee of the Regions, channels the Beatles and Pavarotti to argue for simple, powerful, messages from the European Parliament to engage the public. She discusses the role Cohesion Policy can play in binding the interests of local authorities and MEPs, arguing against the renationalisation of structural funds. She calls for the Committee of the Regions to be strengthened and for improvements in the direct links between the European Parliament and national equivalents of the LGA.

From academia, **Dr Christian Kaunert and Kamil Zwolski** at the University of Salford give a useful overview of the debate amongst experts on the EU's perceived democratic deficit. Comparing the positions of Moravscik, who believes the EU's structure provides several layers of democratic accountability, with that of Follesdall and Hicks who argue that the lack of party competition at EU level and the historic weakness of the Parliament compared with the Council and Commission affects its legitimacy, Kaunert and Zwolski argue that the EU is more than a simple international organisation and that it is counterproductive to make direct analogies between the national and EU level. Rejecting the view of the German Constitutional Court, they call for a strengthening of the EU as the world's first democratic multinational cosmopolitan democracy.

**Reconnecting the European Parliament and its People
by Richard Corbett**

Is there a growing disconnect between politicians and the wider public? Is this particularly acute with regard to the European institutions in general and the European Parliament in particular? If so, what can be done about it?

When it comes to the European Parliament, this is a debate plagued on the one hand by superficial perceptions and on the other by significant constraints as to what can plausibly be done to change the existing situation.

Low turnout?

Claims that there is a disconnect between the European Parliament and its voters often take as their starting point the low participation rates in European Parliamentary elections. Yet, the turn-out in European elections is about the same as for mid-term US Congressional elections. And it is normal that it is lower than for national parliamentary elections in European countries - less is at stake.

It is also frequently pointed out that turnout has fallen - by around 20% over a 30 year period. Even allowing for the fact that this decline has been accentuated by the accession of new member states, several of whom have a low turnout in all elections, its order of magnitude is similar to the decline in turnout in national parliamentary elections in several countries. Declining participation is a challenge for democracy at all levels, it is not peculiar to the European level, even if the latter does have special features.

Even on a low turnout, European elections do result in all the main strands of public opinion being represented in the EP. Indeed, they are represented in proportion to their strength, as expressed proportionally in those elections – and being mid-term elections in terms of the national political cycle, they often result in a larger share of the

seats going to opposition parties and smaller parties than would be the case in most national elections, thereby naturally balancing the Council, which is, of course, composed exclusively of representatives from governing parties.

The EP contains MEPs both from parties that are in government and parties that are in opposition in each country; parties of the left and of the right and even some parties who are opposed to the very existence of the EU. It brings pluralism and ensures that EU decisions are not taken exclusively by ministers, diplomats and bureaucrats - and this happens independently of the level of turnout.

EU legislation must be approved by the elected national governments meeting in the Council and by the directly elected European Parliament as well. This double scrutiny means that draft legislation must pass two hurdles to become law. But these two hurdles are two safeguards as to the quality of European legislation. At the same time, every national parliament now receives all EU proposals in time to debate them before its minister goes to the Council meeting to discuss them.

The EU's central administration is headed by 'Commissioners', who are politicians nominated by Prime Ministers (or Presidents) and subject to the approval of the European Parliament. The Parliament can also dismiss the Commission. The President of the Commission is elected by the European Parliament on the basis of a nomination made by the European Council in light of the results of the European election.

The EU therefore has a higher level of parliamentary scrutiny, and indeed other checks and balances, than any other international structure in the world, from the WTO to the IMF, the World Bank, the WHO or NATO. Nonetheless, low participation rates in elections combined with the lower coverage given in the media (to what is for most

newspapers a more distant Parliament) and the fact that most politicians would prefer to play a prominent role in the national parliament, mean that the European Parliament is seen by much of the public as second-tier.

Furthermore, the fact that it has only recently gained genuine legislative powers means that it still has a lingering reputation as a powerless talking shop. Such a perception can change, but usually does so only over a period of time.

What can be done to improve the visibility of the Parliament, the status of its MEPs and the bond between them and the electorate? A number of suggestions regularly arise. Let us examine some of them.

Changing the electoral system?

Although all member states must use proportional representation, it is left up to them to decide which particular system to use. Opinions are divided as to whether this variation is in itself a problem. Rather, the debate has focused on particular features in different countries.

In larger countries, there has been a discussion on whether there should be national or regional constituencies. National constituencies tend to mean national lists, with little local ownership or identification with MEPs (except where parties make a particular effort to compose their list with geographical balance and with the expectation that elected members will carry out the visible constituency services in the area). France actually switched from national lists to regional lists, but using super-regions, each bringing together two or three of its traditional regions. It is likely that smaller constituencies might increase the proximity of MEPs to their voters in the larger member states.

Another discussion is whether to use closed or open lists of candidates. Open lists are superficially attractive as they allow voters to choose, not just between parties, but

between individuals within or among parties. The difficulty, however, is that in such systems most candidates are competing more with their own party colleagues than with their opponents from other parties, resulting in highly individualised campaigns, each seeking to gain public attention by taking a different line from their own party on a populist issue or by abseiling down buildings or performing other stunts. Instead of choosing between a handful of coherent teams, offering a range of policy options, the electorate is faced with a cacophony of individuals seeking personal attention. It incentivises candidates to spend (and therefore to raise) their own money for campaigning. It also gives a premium to candidates who are well-known for other reasons (famous sports personalities, film stars, etc), though some might consider this a benefit.

Transnational lists?

It is sometimes argued that the European elections lack a European dimension, because there are no Europe-wide teams of candidates or list-leaders campaigning across the EU. Although there must be a grain of truth in this argument, it is balanced by the argument that electing a proportion of MEPs on a transnational basis would create a two tier system of members, one of which would be perceived as highly remote from the electorate. In any case, such a change would require a modification to the treaties, needing unanimous support from every member state and national ratification which is highly unlikely.

A direct link to the election of the Commission?

In most European countries, when we vote in national parliamentary elections, most of us are thinking about the government: do we want to give them another chance or throw the rascals out? In Britain, the link between the Parliamentary election results and the composition of the executive is particularly visible, as the furniture vans traditionally move into Downing Street the very next day in

the event of a change of parliamentary majority (though in May 2010 it took five days).

In European elections, there is no visible link between the election results and the nature of the executive. All that appears to be at stake is the exact balance between the different political forces in a multi-party parliament. What changes as a result of citizens casting their vote is not so clearly visible.

Of course, if the Commission as a whole emerged from a parliamentary majority, such a link would be visible. However, it is unlikely in the near future that individual governments will relinquish their right to nominate the candidate Commissioner from their country. Where there *is* room for a linkage to a parliamentary majority is regarding the choice of the President of the Commission.

The President of the Commission does not rotate "Buggins turn" around the member states. It is a political choice that has to be made each time. Already, the Parliament has had the right to confirm the nominee for President made by the European Council. In future, under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament will "elect" the President and the European Council will be obliged to make a proposal to the Parliament for Commission President "taking into account the elections to the European Parliament."

It is highly likely that this will, in due course, result in European political parties nominating in advance their candidate for President of the Commission. That will in itself add to the interest of the European elections. The link, that people in Europe are used to, between parliamentary majorities and the choice of the executive will at least be present as regards the President of the Commission.

Cleaning up the act?

In an age of cynicism about politicians, and in particular, their cost to the taxpayer, their expenses and their vulnerability to temptations, it is not surprising that the European Parliament is also vulnerable.

The salary level of MEPs may indeed be based on a weighted average of that of MPs from the national parliaments of the largest member states in the Union, but it does result in a level which is considerably higher than even the Prime Minister of some of the new, less prosperous states.

In the circumstances, it is particularly important that the Parliament is not seen to be profligate in other ways. Parliament has no discretion about two major constraints that increase its costs to the taxpayer: the obligations imposed upon it by the member states to work in three different locations (Brussels, Strasbourg, Luxembourg) and the requirement to work in all the official languages of the Union with interpretation at meetings and translation documents. Much as many MEPs would like to see a change to at least the first of these constraints, the prospect of member states agreeing seems remote.

However, Parliament does have full discretion over two other elements: its own staffing levels and its own system for members' expenses. Both of these are left to Parliament's own judgement, because of a four decade old gentleman's agreement with the Council of ministers.

Recent scandals in national parliaments, not least the UK House of Commons, have shown that it is often unwise to leave such matters entirely in the hands of the members. They can all too easily persuade themselves of the necessity for additional advice and support or for additional costs to be met.

The European Parliament now has a secretariat of nearly 6,000 people and (in addition) MEPs may engage, in their parliamentary office or in their constituency office, the services of up to half a dozen assistants (depending on the salary level) paid by Parliament. Of course, MEPs will compare the level of expert advice they receive with that available to the Commission and Council. They will also compare their own staffing levels to those of the US Congress. They will all too easily persuade themselves of the need to increase it - but they are unlikely to take the wider public with them. They leave themselves vulnerable to attack.

Similarly, when it comes to MEPs' expenses, Parliament has commendably tightened up on the travel expenses regime (where it used to be possible for Members to actually make a profit) but the system of the general expenses allowance (intended to cover the cost of Members' constituency offices and other expenses relating to their work) leaves much to be desired. MEPs are not obliged to provide receipts (although many do have a thorough audit, but only because it is required by their own political party, not because it is required by the Parliament).

These are matters on which Parliament is highly vulnerable and which lie largely in its own hands. They do not require a treaty change, nor even unanimity among the member states.

Unfamiliar system?

The European Parliament is one where majorities are built issue by issue. There is no governing majority nor a predetermined coalition. Arguably, this is a return to the original concept of a Parliament (from *parler*, to talk) - a place where issues can be talked through, evaluated and compromises struck in a pluralist environment. But it is not what people in most modern European countries are used to. They are more familiar with parliaments which provide

an automatic majority for their government - if they don't, it is a political crisis. Parliaments provide a forum where government and opposition can clash and present alternative views, but in almost all cases, the outcomes of parliamentary votes are entirely predictable.

The European Parliament is unlikely to change in this respect, even if a direct link emerges (as discussed above) between the results of European parliamentary elections and the choice of the President of the Commission. What it does mean is that this needs far better explanation to the public than has been the case before. This is a tall order, when much of the media is either not particularly interested or is downright hostile to presenting the European Parliament accurately, let alone in a favourable light. But unless the Parliament, national governments, political parties, national curricula and those parts of the media that do feel a sense of responsibility, start to explain things better, then this aspect at least of the disconnect between the parliament and citizens will be difficult to remedy. It is to be hoped that a publication such as this one will make a small contribution in this regard.

After Lisbon:
Creating more space for democratic debate
by Michael Shackleton

It is often argued that the European Union (EU) was established and developed by stealth without its citizens being aware of what was being done in their name. Such arguments found expression in the constant claim that the EU suffers from a "democratic deficit" that has undermined the claims of legitimacy of the Brussels institutions. Proposals for remedying that deficit have been legion over the last 20 years. The Lisbon Treaty that came into force on 1 December 2009 represents the latest and most developed attempt to create more space for democratic debate across the European Union. It is too early to judge the success of these efforts but one can already identify three areas where the Treaty opens up more possibilities for such a debate.

The first area is the role of the European Parliament, and in particular, the extension of its position as an equal partner of the Council; the second is the part played by national parliaments, notably their new right to participate directly in the EU legislative process; and the third is the creation of a citizens' initiative, enabling those outside the institutions to have an impact on the legislative agenda. In all three cases, we are starting to see how the Treaty provisions have been or may be applied and what kind of political debate is likely to emerge over the coming years. The evidence suggests that we may start to see a rather different kind of EU emerging over the next decade, not necessarily a more comfortable one, but certainly one where there is a broader public debate about the direction of the EU and its policies than there has been up to now.

The idea of the European Parliament as an equal partner of the Council is not a new one. It goes back at least as far as the Maastricht Treaty, which in 1993 introduced the co-decision procedure, giving the Parliament equal legislative rights with the Council. Lisbon has carried the logic of

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Maastricht to its logical conclusion, by giving the Parliament such rights in virtually all areas of legislation. Hence, previously no-go areas, such as agriculture and the structural funds, have now become subject to co-decision. Full awareness of the implications of such changes takes time but the circle of interests in society not touched by potential amendments of the Parliament is undoubtedly getting much smaller. Moreover, there is a gradual growing recognition that such amendments are not purely decorative. The City of London has been made very well aware of the kinds of changes suggested by the Parliament to improve the management of the financial services industry. Similarly, banks have seen changes to the structure of bonuses agreed between Parliament and Council and reflecting the Parliament's priorities.

Curiously, one of the more striking developments of the last year in relations with the Council falls outside the legislative domain. Lisbon gave Parliament a right of consent, a yes or no power, to most international agreements and in February 2010 it used that power to veto an agreement negotiated by the Council and the Commission with the United States concerning the exchange of bank data (known as SWIFT). Parliament felt that the agreement placed too much emphasis on the fight against terrorism and too little on the rights to privacy of European citizens and requirements of reciprocity. Subsequently, in June it approved a revised version of the agreement, but the significance of its earlier action was reflected in the level of attention that the Parliament received from the United States government. It recognised in the European Parliament a body not so unlike its own Congress which needed to be taken seriously if the executive was to get its way. Moreover, it was clear that the debate on the adequacy of this agreement, or indeed any other international agreement, was not one that could have a real impact within any other forum. The recognition of the importance of engaging with the European Parliament in relation to such agreements is thus very likely to spread over the coming years.

The second area of change under Lisbon is the role of national parliaments. It was one of the implicit bargains in the Convention negotiations that preceded the adoption of the ill-starred Constitution that an increase in the co-decision powers of the European Parliament should be accompanied by a reinforced position for national legislatures. Lisbon has duly given national parliaments direct involvement in EU law-making in a way that was not appreciated by those who considered that their role should be limited to scrutinising their governments.

What the Treaty does is to give national parliaments eight weeks to examine Commission proposals and to consider whether they meet the principle of subsidiarity. If they consider they infringe that principle, they can issue a negative opinion and if half of the national parliaments of the EU agree, the Parliament and the Council have to decide whether or not to proceed with the examination of the proposal or not. So far, no proposal has been so badly received that the 50% threshold (known as the "orange card") has been reached, but this needs to be seen in the context of relatively limited legislative activity in the course of this Commission's mandate so far.

However, as important as the precise details of what has happened so far, are the questions of the impact of the provisions on the thinking of national parliaments. Their new role gives them new responsibility, as well as a new power. How far will they be willing to go in assuming an independent role as compared with the executives in their respective countries? How much effort will individual parliaments, such as Westminster, expend in seeking to coordinate their positions with other parliaments? And what will the level of cooperation be with the European Parliament, with whom national parliaments have sometimes had a rather difficult relationship?   Irrespective of the answers given, it will be that much more difficult to treat EU legislation as a breed apart, reserved for specialists, in every parliament. All citizens will be entitled

to find out what their MP has done in relation to particular proposals from Brussels and s/he will be expected to be able to give an answer. National parliaments seem likely to be drawn more tightly into the EU world as a result, again generating more debate on the options the EU faces.

Last but not least, Lisbon has provided the basis for a "citizens' initiative" whereby a million citizens from a "significant" number of Member States can invite the European Commission to bring forward an appropriate proposal. The precise shape of this exercise in transnational citizen participation still has to be agreed: the Belgian Presidency hopes to be able to do so before the end of 2010. However, the debate so far has revealed that this could be a source of considerable contestation over the coming years. At least three areas of difficulty can be identified apart from the obvious ones of deciding what makes up a "significant" number of Member States and how many signatories should have to come from each of them.

First, the Treaty specifies that the initiative has to fall within the framework of the powers of the European Commission. Hence, the Commission will be in a position to refuse to treat proposals that are outside its remit, telling individuals early in the procedure not to proceed with the gathering of signatures. However, it is hard to see how the gathering of signatures could be formally stopped if those concerned wished to make a particular political point. Already, the Commission has said it could not proceed with the suggestion that the European Parliament should have a single seat in Brussels: it is not within its powers. And yet if a million signatures could be gathered, it would necessarily become a part of the ongoing debate on the issue.

Second, the Treaty does not exclude initiatives that contradict each other or indeed that run counter to the policy of the European Commission. It is not difficult to imagine proposals that would be considered objectionable on the grounds of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, for

example, where the Commission would be obliged to say no to further action. However, here again the gathering of the signatures would by itself have created debate and contestation, thereby thickening the democratic debate at European level. It would not necessarily be very comfortable, but the source of the debate would be seen as coming from outside the institutions and thereby widening the argument about the EU's direction.

Third, there is the issue of the weight to be given to one million signatures. It represents 0.2% of the EU population and therefore could be seen as a well-organised minority, whose views conflict with that of the wider public. However, in practice it is unlikely that this minority would be totally cut off from the political party structure that exists in the EU Member States and the European Parliament. Political parties might indeed wish to use the initiative as a way to promote a particular policy: the idea has already been mooted in Germany and Austria concerning bank bonuses. In that way, they would convert the initiative into the kind of request for a legislative proposal that the European Parliament can already put to the Commission, but with the argument that a significant section of European society supports it. No doubt there will be many variations but all open the way to a restructuring of the way that the debate about possible EU action takes place.

No-one would wish to argue that the wider debate and contestation involved in reinforcing the power of the European Parliament and national parliaments and in creating the citizens' initiative will, of itself, reinforce the level of legitimacy of the EU and acceptance of its decisions. Within national communities, acceptance of majority decisions by minorities is never easy and it is even less so at EU level, with loyalties so much more firmly anchored at the national level. If there is a means to overcome this difficulty, it will be as much by what the EU does rather than by the way it organises decision-making. Nevertheless, the Treaty opens a new page and greatly increases the scope

for democratic debate and reduces the weight of claims about a democratic deficit. It is now up to the institutions at EU and national level and European citizens to fill the space that the Treaty has created.

Civil society and democracy in Europe
by Liz Atkins

With the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is now entering a new phase. The focus on internal dynamics and institutional reform can be put to one side and the EU will now be able to move forward and begin to reconnect with the issues that matter to people in every country. The democratic deficit in national politics has been felt even more acutely at the EU level. The EU is all too remote, too disconnected from their lives. For traditional representative democracy to work, it must be supplemented with new forms of politics. There must be meaningful citizen participation. However this can only happen if the institutions provide a space for the voices of people and communities to be heard. I believe that this can be achieved by working with civil society.

Over the past few years, the EU has been deeply embroiled in debates about constitutional and legislative reform, such as voting procedures and roles in the European Commission. These are important matters but they are not issues that appeal to ordinary citizens across Europe. In member states we are witnessing a rise in citizen engagement on specific issues. More than a third of people who do not vote in elections, do participate in a charity, community group or campaign. And alternative forms of political activity – whether buying fair trade goods or joining online communities – is rising not falling. It is my view that this type of engagement that gives citizens a say on crucial issues, such as climate change or financial equality, is needed within the EU.

Now we have a newly elected Parliament, and its members have been active in approving the new Commission operating under the new Treaty and in ensuring gender balance in the top posts of the EU. I am pleased that the High Representative, Cathy Ashton is someone with voluntary sector experience who understands what the

sector can do to build connections. The Parliament has been more assertive and it remains the most open, democratic part of the EU institutions. The current situation presents a real challenge but it is also an opportunity for EU institutions; for MEPs; and for voluntary sector organisations like my own.

So how might the new situation change the basis for participation in Europe?

In order to understand the ways to reconnect citizens in a more democratic EU, there are a few key areas to be considered: the Lisbon Treaty; the European Parliament's AGORA; and the wider bridging role of civil society.

The Lisbon Treaty

Particularly welcome is Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty which underlines that every citizen has the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union, says that decisions will be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen and promises an "open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society".

This is a clear recognition by the institutions of the EU that there is a need for open discussion with the citizens of Europe. It enshrines the principle of participation as a fundamental part of the decision-making process and recognises that there is a mutual benefit for representative and participatory forms of democracy. The key point is that direct engagement in EU debates will help people understand and take a stronger interest in EU elections as well as in the changing role of the European Parliament. By allowing space for citizens and communities to raise their concerns a significant additional channel is opened for communication and engagement.

What is crucial for civil society is the recognition of the role of 'representative associations' including voluntary,

community and non-profit organisations, as they often provide a collective voice for and access to the most hard to reach citizens. This Article enshrines a new type of process at the European level, that allows for more engaged citizenship and for a more transparent and accessible system. It encourages participation and deliberation across Europe that may begin to overcome the sense of disenfranchisement that has been so widespread in Europe over recent years.

It also provides a practical tool for greater civil society engagement – the Citizens' Initiative – which will enable one million citizens to petition the Commission to present a proposal in any of its areas of responsibility. This is potentially a very useful tool for voluntary sector campaigners working in coalition to get their issue on the EU agenda. It provides a forum for raising issues of concern and thereby supports the approach specific campaigns take to bring about lasting change.

However, to make this citizen engagement work, the EU must also be transparent in its response, specifying the steps taken to address the issue, outlining a clear timeline for action. An initial response should be provided within 3 months, in a public communication to ensure that all the signatories and media are able to maintain an active public debate. The communication should specify any further steps to be taken including undertaking impact assessments and studies on the proposed action, as well as making recommendations on the specific bodies to be involved, whether a Directorate General, or further consultation with the European Parliament.

This Article in the Treaty marks a welcome shift in terms of greater recognition and provides a legal basis for the role of civil society.

European Parliament's AGORA

Reconnection with the people must be top of the European Parliament's agenda. The Parliament is the body with a direct mandate from the people of Europe and each of its MEPs is accountable to their constituents. They have specific defined interests in key areas for civil society and they should be even more open to debate with voluntary sector bodies and their beneficiaries.

There have already been steps in the right direction. The most explicit form of direct engagement took place in 2007 and 2008 when the Parliament opened its doors to discussions with non profit organisations through the AGORA process. This was a process to establish a forum for debate inside the EP hemicycle, led by French Green MEP Gerard Onesta and German Socialist MEP Jo Leinen. They recognised that the parliament had a wide range of links with organisations through its various committees, so they aimed to bring these together in an assembly of civil society over a period of two days. The process was further supported by European Commissioner for Communication, Margot Wallstrom, who had also been very active in stimulating discussion in the run-up to the Lisbon Treaty under the '*Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*'.

The first AGORA in November 2007 aimed to provide a forum for debate on the institutional arrangements of the EU, including four themes:

- Rights of the individual to be consolidated and understood;
- Tools for the EU, surrounding the decision-making procedures;
- Borders and the EU's international role;
- Future horizons, including ways of engaging civil society, developing consultation transparency and participatory decision-making.

The second Agora took place in March 2008 and focused on issues surrounding the environment and climate change. This had a much more direct agenda and led to a significant shift in the debate on climate change, with a number of MEPs calling for tighter limits on carbon emissions.

What was most encouraging about these events was that strong, high level support from the Parliament meant that there was good political involvement from across the EU and there was direct civil society engagement with MEPs in an open and frank discussion.

What was disappointing was that the agenda was set by MEPs with little input from civil society so the initial choice of subjects was limited. Furthermore, there was a lack of transparency in the selection of participants, which led to confusion as to the target audience. Finally, there was such a wide range of topics for debate in a short space of time that this led to some excessively broad final statements and not all views were included in the final texts

What is needed is to trust civil society more and to build greater transparency through more open citizen engagement in Europe. The organisations of civil society can play a pivotal role in bringing together a wide range of views and assisting in setting out a long-term agenda for the benefit of the communities they serve. It would be very useful to develop and promote the AGORA to ensure that the Parliament is open to civil society at least once a year for a debate related to the priorities on the agenda of the regular Ministerial meetings.

Civil society as a bridge on key issues

So what is the role of civil society in this changing landscape of European democratic engagement?

Voluntary and community organisations work to meet the needs and concerns of their supporters and beneficiaries.

They can play an essential role in facilitating their beneficiaries' involvement with decision makers and, where this is not possible, acting as the "voice" of disenfranchised citizens that need to be empowered to talk directly to and influence Government. Voluntary organisations bring real passion to politics. Their campaigns set the agenda in many key areas. They are trusted more than politicians and political parties because they are seen as experts, independent of government and not driven by a profit motive. They connect with people in ways that political parties unfortunately no longer do – and offer a less daunting way to get involved in public policy debate.

Voluntary and community organisations' work with communities enable them to reach parts of society that others do not. They enable politicians and policy-makers to engage with a much wider range of interests than would otherwise be possible. They enable people to learn from each other, identify their collective needs – and find ways of meeting them. And they can enable more people to engage in the democratic process – and better hold government to account.

Politicians must be more open to influence from outside their parties and be prepared do things differently, listening and learning from the direct experience of those affected by their policies. Not accessible just to those interests that can afford to lobby them in Brussels. By working with voluntary and community organisations, politicians can reach more isolated communities and hear views of those who are less able to influence the public policy agenda.

In order to build this bridge and connect with these organisations and individuals, there are specific networks that can facilitate this dialogue. National umbrella bodies for civil society organisations such as NCVO have a unique role in bringing views together and providing a collective voice. They are able to bring together many different types of organisations from the very smallest community group to

the largest charities and can provide a channel for debate with the relevant organisations on any relevant issue. These national bodies are now working together across Europe as never before and have created a new group, the European Network of National Associations for Civil Society (ENNA) which is filling the gap between organisations at national and European levels.

It is intended that this new grouping will provide a channel for debate with civil society in each European country, including many of the newer Eastern member states. It will furthermore act to bring fresh voices to the European civil society debates with the European Economic & Social Committee. Some key members of the EESC have a link to national civil society umbrellas and this body can also provide a portal for organisations in the EU.

These organisations have a shared vision of a new framework for civil society in Europe that would include:

- An agreement with the institutions to clarify the opportunities for participation in EU decision-making (like the Compact between the Government and the Voluntary sector in England);
- A Civil Society House for organisations to have a permanent space in Brussels near the European Parliament, this will allow networks to pool resources and use shared meeting rooms as well as a drop-in facility for any NGO or non-profit organisations to use and;
- An inter-group[17] in the European Parliament to consider and scrutinise broad civil society issues.

In conclusion, the new landscape of the EU following the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty demonstrates the EU's much greater intention to promote participation and dialogue, but this must now be taken forward into practical forms of

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[17] An intergroup is broadly similar to an All Party Parliamentary Group at Westminster, although it has external partners that make it similar in some respects to an Associate Parliamentary Group.

action. The Treaty document is not sufficient, its provisions must be converted into direct forms of participation to rebuild citizens' trust in the EU. The European Parliament provides a very useful mechanism in the form of the AGORA, and its democratic mandate makes it the crucial actor in reconnecting the EU. It should work with civil society organisations which are uniquely placed to provide a bridge to re-connect people and communities across all member states.

But if the organisations of civil society are to play this vital role, acting as a bridge for wider democratic engagement with the Parliament, this new relationship must be built on trust. EU politicians and officials must recognise that participatory and representative forms of democracy are complementary and provide reciprocal benefits. They must recognize that by providing citizens with real opportunities to have a say – and an influence – they will achieve a more effective dialogue and connection with their people which will benefit not just EU institutions but their communities as well.

The European Parliament and British business:
Bridging the gaps
by Dr Adam Marshall

My travels take me to Chambers of Commerce across the length and breadth of Britain, where I have the opportunity to meet with a wide range of businesses, from sole traders to multi-national companies.

All of them tell me of the problems they face as a result of Government action – or, in many cases, inaction. Some recognise the European influences that stand behind particular legislative requirements, particularly with regard to employment regulation and the environment. A rare few even go so far as to cite a particular EU Directive as the source of their particular complaint.

That, however, is where most companies' familiarity with Europe ends. For most, the entire European project is shrouded in mystery, at least until it results in a direct effect on the way their business operates. The European Parliament fares particularly poorly in my unscientific inquiries. Very few businesses, with the exception of the biggest and most organised, are even in close contact with their MEPs – much less understand the Parliament's role in the EU legislative machine.

There are three gaps between MEPs and the average SME:

First, the language gap. Westminster politicians are used to speaking the media's language, as profile and visibility are often more highly valued than legislative detail. The reverse is true in Brussels and Strasbourg – meaning that the UK's MEPs, however effective in Committee, have a hard time getting their message through back home.

Second, there's a perception gap. Businesses grumble that they are paying for MEPs whom they feel don't represent them, while MEPs grumble that businesses do not engage

with them or their work. To a degree, both are right to express dissatisfaction with the status quo. Yet, the two groups' perceptions of each other remain poles apart.

Third, there's a gap created by distance – both physical and virtual. Businesspeople are used to seeing Westminster MPs in the constituency, week after week, and derive security from the fact that they can travel easily to London in order to meet with them on a substantive issue. MEPs, meanwhile, spend a huge amount of time on legislative work in Brussels and Strasbourg, leaving them little time to travel back to their constituencies. These, in turn, are so large that they are often impossible for MEPs to 'cover' adequately. And when it comes to virtual communication with business constituents, Westminster MPs are also far ahead.

Until the European Parliament's work and its membership are de-mystified for businesses, these gaps are unlikely to close. The remainder of this short article will try to shed more light on the existing connections between the EP and the average SME, through the lens of the Chamber of Commerce network. It will then seek to make recommendations to MEPs and to businesses – both of whom will need to do more to engage in order to ensure a stronger business influence in the European legislative process.

Bridging the gaps

As the principal representatives of local business communities, Chambers of Commerce across the UK have a big role to play in bridging the gaps outlined above. Chambers are regularly asked how new European legislation may affect individual companies and their owners' livelihoods.

An excellent example of positive engagement between business and the European Parliament is the relationship

between the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and the MEPs representing the West Midlands. The Chamber meets all six MEPs at least once a year both in North Staffordshire and Brussels, and has a very close working relationship with three of the MEPs.

Additionally, the Chamber provides platforms for the MEPs as well as background information and case studies that enable them to make EU legislation more business-friendly. For example, Liz Lynne MEP helped the Chamber build a relationship with Guido Sacconi, the rapporteur on the REACH directive. Sacconi visited various firms in Stoke-on-Trent, where he was able to gain a better understanding of the impact of his proposals on real businesses. The result was a piece of EU law that cost business less than was originally intended, and that simultaneously introduced a series of derogations and transition periods for SMEs. Chamber members were able to take advantage of these – and to respond positively to the new directive.

Sadly, this model of positive engagement is not replicated across the UK. Some Chambers have never been contacted by their MEPs – or have never attempted to contact MEPs themselves. In this scenario, both sides lose out: legislation misses out on vital business input, and Chambers and their members fail to influence decisions taken by their elected representatives.

Recommendations for change

The experiences related above reveal serious concerns about the state of relations between MEPs and the UK's business community. There is a real gulf between MEPs and one of their key constituencies.

However, all is not lost. There are a number of concrete steps that could be taken to ratchet up engagement and interaction between SMEs and members of the European Parliament. Some will require new ways of thinking – but

others build on existing initiatives, and represent an important opportunity to consolidate relationships between the two sides.

Familiarisation

The European Parliament of Enterprises (EPE) is convened every two years by Eurochambres, the association of European Chambers of Commerce. At the last event in 2008, the UK SME community was well represented – with over seventy businesses brought together by the British Chambers of Commerce. As we prepare for the next meeting of the EPE in October 2010, the Chamber of Commerce network will be working hard to ensure that the event provides a Brussels-based opportunity for businesses to meet their MEPs. There is a need to further expand the EPE – giving more businesspeople the chance to see the EP up close.

The EPE on its own, however, is not enough. The British Chambers of Commerce believes that a national programme of events for MEPs and businesses should be attached to it in order to bridge some of the physical and cultural gaps that currently divide SME owners and MEPs. We believe this should be an all-party event, to highlight the diversity of the UK's European representation. An annual gathering, linked to existing EPE activity, would encourage MEPs from all parties to take business needs more thoroughly into account. The EPLP's existing Business Policy Council may provide some useful lessons for such a cross-party event. This sort of forum is especially critical to encourage the high number of UK MEPs that do not engage with business issues, especially from UKIP and the BNP, to play a more constructive role in the EP on behalf of UK plc.

Training sessions can also help both businesses and Chambers of Commerce to better understand the European policy-making agenda, and the role of MEPs in shaping outcomes. The BCC and other organisations conduct these

sessions regularly – for example, through the BCC Brussels Office – but they could be stepped up in order to bridge the perception gaps mentioned above. Better-trained businesses can act as advocates for the wider SME community at European level, working with other like-minded organisations to lobby the most important and effective MEPs. For this reason, the BCC will be conducting bi-annual lobbying and training visits to Brussels for groups of British businesses.

Communication

In our view, MEPs lack the level of exposure in the regional media that they need for businesses and other interest groups to understand their work better. We would like to see better access to regional television for MEPs, which could be delivered through a duty on public-service broadcasters or a regular scheduled programme linked to regional news and current affairs.

Individual MEPs will also have to do more to boost their profile with businesses. While we recognise that MEPs have large constituencies – e.g. 6 MEPs for the entire West Midlands region, compared with 59 Westminster MPs – we do believe that MEPs must do more to overcome their perceived remoteness from local businesspeople. MEPs should invest in ISDN lines in order to participate in the maximum possible number of local radio programmes, and should make better use of new media and social networking sites to get their message across. If combined with more constituency 'business surgeries' during EP recesses, these measures would help to cut the 'distance gap' even further.

Finally, the media and MEPs themselves need to take responsibility for breaking down the language gap that exists between businesspeople and the European Parliament. Too much communication between lobbyists and MEPs is shot through with Brussels jargon – while

media coverage of EU business issues is often couched in overly evocative and sinister Eurosceptic language.

If we want to break down the barriers between the European institutions and local businesspeople, a concerted campaign for clear and effective communication needs to be launched. This is something that the political groups in the EP should spearhead – by better integrating their messages at local, regional, national and European level, as Anne Fairweather, a Labour Euro-candidate, has recommended in the past. Until there is greater coherence in their messages, and debate about European policies becomes a clearer part of national political life, engagement with businesses will remain patchy.

Reconnecting the European Parliament with local communities
by Cllr Flo Clucas

It was a summer's evening, June 25th 1967; a night that would change the world. Not because man had landed on the moon, nor because there had been some great cataclysmic event, but in its own way, because the peoples of the world had come together as they never had before.

The first global television broadcast 'Our World' had taken place. Today, no one remembers whether a great political leader had spoken, nor whether a president, monarch or prime minister was interviewed, but, watched by some 400 million people in 26 countries, what is remembered is a song by four young men from the north west of England. They had sung 'All You Need is Love' to a worldwide audience. Things would never be the same again.

The world was on our doorstep, in our living rooms. For the first time, the peoples of the world could hear and see events on the other side of the globe as they happened. And there, at the heart of this great, new adventure, was the North West of England! Satellites, sputniks, spacemen and even our own Jodrell Bank had been instrumental in making it happen and it raised questions about how we communicate and what we communicate across the world.

Now, some 40 years on, we take global communications for granted. We chatter on mobile phones, watch television broadcasts from the other side of the world and have removed many of the barriers to communication that existed in 1967.

Yet, what resonated in 1967 is something has carried through to our own time. For what is remembered about the broadcast is the very simple message in a three minute song 'All You Need is Love'.

Technical expertise, legal requirements, political messages all played their part, but the simple, understandable message, with all that it implies, is what remains. While the medium was important, it was the message that changed the world. For 'love' was no longer a word with sexual connotations, but carried with it a care for our fellow human beings.

Simplicity of language, care for others wherever they happen to live, the ability to make the complex meaningful to all, these are still relevant today; perhaps now, more than ever, as institutions, such as the European Parliament, struggle to be heard above the babble of sound that is modern communication.

Distance, rules, regulations, a violence of voices all fighting to be heard; the impossibility of relating the European to the local; how can an institution such as the European Parliament make itself relevant to those it seeks to serve? Where is the simple message that will stand the test of time? Can we learn from a 40 year old broadcast about what we can do today to link the European with the local? Can lessons be learnt from simple songs? The answer to all of these questions is of course, yes. The greater question is how?

There was another musical event that captivated its audience: the World Cup, 1990, Rome and a genius introduced the world to the three tenors. Here was a musical form and its classical artistry that had become the prerogative of the few suddenly becoming accessible to millions across the globe. Simplicity of approach, great presentation and a meaningful message succeeded in bringing the classics to a new audience and made popular what had been exclusive.

However, what is easy in one sphere may not be in others. For the European Parliament to become meaningful it must

first find not just the song it wants to sing but those with whom it wants to perform.

Will it be simply a legislature, concerned only with rules and regulations? Does it wish to be the body that holds and secures the European ideal? Or could it do something else? Could the European Parliament use the measures that it has at its fingertips to work with local authorities to compose a new song for itself; a song that would enable local authorities to grow through Cohesion Policy and the green agenda.

Of course, the European Parliament has many links with local people, after all it is elected! But those links are not easy to find in spite of the fact that some 50% (and others put it as high as 70%) of all EU legislation is enacted through local authorities; everything from waste disposal to habitat preservation. For most citizens however, the links are neither obvious nor important. If the electorate realised how much the European Parliament influenced their lives, they might be more tempted to vote! Amenity and lobbying groups do work extensively with MEPs, but they are in specialised areas.

There are considerable common interests with local authorities and it is here that I believe the European Parliament can really make an impact and, in the process, begin to change the perception of all things European.

The interests are within the field of Structural Funds, or Cohesion Funding as it is known. The EU Cohesion Policy (money that is given to bring regeneration and employment in poorer areas up to the European average) is potentially one of the most forward-looking and innovative links between local communities and the European Union.

Imagine: seven years guaranteed funding; local decision making; involvement by local people in the process; an agreed pot of money; the opportunity to plan for the long

term; and the certain knowledge that all of this is to regenerate our cities, towns, villages and counties.

Imagine all of that married to a green agenda, one that supports local business growth and the knowledge economy.

Now look at structural funds and see what they have the power to do, if allowed to do so and if rules are not gold plated by our own civil servants. This is the link between the EP and its people. It is a link that opens possibilities for MEPs to help us fight to keep Cohesion and Regional Policy Europe-wide rather than confined to new member states.

Here is the song that we, in local government, in the Committee of the Regions and in the EP can sing in chorus. For the answer lies in how Europe relates to its cities, regions and local communities. For Europe can be and should be the champion of those who struggle to have their voices heard at national level. 'Ah!' I hear you say, 'If the EU can't make itself relevant to member states, how can it to local areas and people?' The answer lies in what the European Parliament does; in what the EU does, for local people, through its policies. All politics is local, but translating words to action can be very difficult!

Here lies the answer to combating the Brussels bashing that is so beloved of national newspapers. According to the red tops, the ills of nations – particularly our own - are the fault of Brussels! It is easy to see how that interpretation carries weight. After all, we have the evidence of the 'straight banana' and who could forget the famous Jim Hacker Euro sausage! Yet, the opportunity to change that perception is here.

Those of us who have had experience of working with the European Parliament and Commission see the good that they do, the difficulty is translating that to be easily understandable and meaningful, with direct connections to

local people and local government. It is all too easy to use the EU as the national whipping boy because communication is difficult. Difficult that is, unless one is fluent in Eurospeak!

We all know that there is a need for good governance at all levels of government, whether in the UK or the EU. Government hasn't simply to be, nor just to be good, but it must also be relevant and allow decisions to be taken at the closest level to the citizen. The involvement of local authorities in government should enable, not confine. Such a process should also make meaningful the actions of government to the governed, encouraging closer involvement of the voluntary sector, business community, higher and further education and the private sector.

The great beauty of it is that we know it works! The EU Structural Funds programme for 2000-2006 (2009) gave just such an opportunity. In Merseyside, all of the partners were involved at each level of the programme. Each of the sectors, the local authorities and the Pathways Communities – the poorest communities on Merseyside - were all a part of the decision-making process. We had to cope with the rules and regulations, as did every other programme, but the team – for that is what it was – understood and believed in what it was doing and as a result, the EU was a friend, not an enemy; was an enabler, not a controller; and was a provider and teacher, not a dictator.

The approach was simple: there was one Programme Monitoring Committee. The PMC, as it was known, had representatives of all of the partners sitting on it. The Committee met regularly and decided the strategy that we all followed. There were three sub-committees: one responsible for Projects that took the decisions as to which projects would receive cash and how much; one for Performance that monitored how well, or badly, projects were performing; and one for Strategy, that looked at how the strategy was meeting the needs of the area as a

whole. Each of these was chaired by one of the partners: Projects by local government; Performance by the Chamber of Commerce; and Strategy by Higher Education. On each committee were representatives of the sectors and of the community.

The local press was kept fully in the picture and when it came to fighting against the government taking back funding from the EU, re-nationalisation as it is known, all of the partners and the press were on side and gave the support that was needed.

The European Parliament can create, through its co-decision making powers, serious links with local government. It has a formal link through the Committee of the Regions, but on top of that, it can and should link directly with local government at all levels. It can and should use that as a platform for translating the work it does to be meaningful to local people. As Structural Funds have become the visible face of the EU locally, so the European Parliament should become the ear of local government, listening to and acting upon the links it creates. It should seek to cooperate more closely with both the Committee of the Regions and with national LGAs and campaign on those areas of common ground with those of like view.

Initially, it should use its position to come together with all of those regions in the European Union that are in receipt of EU funds. Together with the Committee of the Regions, which under the Lisbon Treaty has become the guardian of subsidiarity, it should fight to ensure that so called 'renationalisation' of funding does not take place.

The European Parliament and the EU democratic deficit:
The right solution to the wrong problem?
by Dr Christian Kaunert and Kamil Zwolski

Popular discourse often depicts the European Union (EU) as an 'undemocratic and bureaucratic monster' imposing its will upon the unwilling and 'sovereignty-less' member states. Consequently, students are often thought to be ideologically opposed to, or, at the very minimum, not interested in studying the EU. The political debate across European countries during the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, revealed these old stereotypes. The media focus was upon all the negative attributes accorded to the European Union – undemocratic, bureaucratic, and ultimately, 'not sexy'. But does the EU actually suffer from a democratic deficit, as is often suggested in political discourse? If so, what is the role of the European Parliament (EP) in this democratic deficit? Does an increasing policy-making role for the EP constitute a natural solution to this problem? It may appear so at first sight: (a) the EP is the only directly elected body of the EU, and (b) parliaments are at the core of national democracies.

Various scholars [18]analyse these questions through EU institutional design. Andrew Moravcsik (2002), on the one hand, vigorously disputes the idea that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit; he considers such concerns to be 'misplaced'. On the other hand, Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix (2006) reject his analysis. In their view, the lack of party competition at the European level affects the legitimacy of the EU, and thus contributes to a democratic deficit at the heart of EU policy-making. But who is right, and what role does the EP play in this analysis? This contribution aims to outline and assess the most important arguments in this debate.

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[18] (Haas, 1958; Lindberg, 1963; Moravcsik, 1998, 1999; Pollack, 1997, 2003; Tallberg, 2003, 2006; Beach, 2005; Stone Sweet and Sandholtz, 1997; Stone Sweet et al., 2001; Kaunert, 2005, 2007, 2009).

According to Moravcsik (2002: 605), '*constitutional checks and balances, indirect democratic control via national governments, and the increasing powers of the European Parliament are sufficient to ensure that EU policy-making is, in nearly all cases, clean, transparent, effective and politically responsive to the demands of European citizens*'.

Firstly, in this analysis, the constitutional structure of the EU imposes significant constraints on EU policy-making, thus eliminating the danger of the EU becoming a super-state. For example, as noted by Moravcsik (2002), trade and aid is an area where the EU has its strongest constitutional prerogatives, leaving many policies outside areas of EU competence (e.g. taxation, defence, policing, etc). Moravcsik also notes that, even in areas where the EU has clear competences, the actual implementation of policies is often left to member states – a natural process considering how relatively small the EU bureaucracy is.

Secondly, in contrast to popular belief, there is a high level of accountability in the EU. Direct accountability is assured through the growing competences of the EP, which increasingly co-decides on EU legislation together with the Council of Ministers (the Council). With the Lisbon Treaty, almost all significant areas of EU policy-making have introduced the principle of co-decision. On the other hand, the Council provides a significant indirect accountability through the elected governments of EU member states. Moravcsik suggests that this indirect accountability is even more important for EU legitimacy, considering that the EU remains a largely intergovernmental organisation.

Considering that there is no justified reason to be concerned about the legitimacy of the EU, Moravcsik (2002: 621) suggests that those who are concerned tend to '*compare the EU to an ideal plebiscitary or parliamentary democracy, standing alone, rather than to the actual functioning of national democracies adjusted for its multi-level context*'.

Moravcsik's analysis is based on his previous work on liberal intergovernmentalism. According to this theory, European integration can best be explained as a series of rational choices made by national leaders (Moravcsik, 1998, p.18), all of which are elected through national election and thereby clearly democratically legitimated. Throughout a large series of works, Moravcsik (1998, 1999) portrays the EU as largely intergovernmental and dominated by member state governments. National leaders make choices in response to constraints and opportunities derived from economic interests of powerful domestic constituents and the relative power of each state in the international system. Moravcsik offers a model of a two-level game consisting of a liberal theory of national preference formation and an intergovernmentalist account of strategic bargaining between states. Given his assumptions on the workings of the EU, it is not surprising that, in his analysis, Moravcsik concludes that the EU democratic deficit is essentially 'a myth'.

Follesdal and Hix (2006) however, do raise objections about the level of democratic accountability in the EU. In their view, the EP remains too weak in relation to executive institutions of EU policy-making. The EP is the parliamentary body of the EU, the only directly elected institution by EU citizens (since 1979). It meets in two locations: Strasbourg and Brussels (Wallace et al., 2005, p.65). In the early years of the EU, the EP had only a marginal role in the policy process due to the 'consultation method'. Since 2004, however, its powers have increased to 'co-decision' in many areas, and are further increased by the Lisbon Treaty. The European Parliament, in general, cannot initiate legislation on its own, but it can amend or veto it in many policy areas. The frequent decision-making method is 'co-decision', which implies a co-legislating role with the Council of Ministers. In general, the Parliament also supervises the European Commission, must approve all appointments to it, and can dismiss it with a vote of censure (Wallace et al., 2005).

Follesdal and Hix (2006) argue that, even though the EP has the power to veto the Commission President and the College of Commissioners nominated by member states, it does not play a role in actually electing them. While this argument is generally correct, it needs to be noted that with the Lisbon Treaty the EP does gain the power to 'elect' the College of Commissioners (as a whole), as well as the Commission President.

Furthermore, according to Follesdal and Hix (2006), national parliaments lack control over the policies undertaken at the EU level. As a result, member states' governments can ignore national parliaments when taking policy decisions in Brussels – something that cannot happen at the domestic level. While this is an accurate description of how EU policy is handled by various EU member states, this is not necessarily the case according to the treaties. A number of states, first and foremost Denmark, oblige the government to receive a mandate from the national parliament, and Danish votes are subject to such a mandate. In principle, all EU member states could opt to have such a system; it is not seen to be in their own 'national interest' to 'tie the hands of their governments during the negotiations'.

Finally, Follesdal and Hix (2006) point out that, although the EP is elected directly by European citizens, these elections are not about Europe. Instead, they focus primarily on national affairs, and, thus, are treated by domestic parties as mid-term national elections. In their view, even if genuinely 'European' elections to the EP could take place, there is the additional problem that EU policy-making is perceived as being too distant and alien to European citizens. This problem is partially caused by the fact that institutions at the EU level do not mirror those within EU member states, which voters might be familiar with. Therefore, Follesdal and Hix (2006) suggest that policy outcomes at the EU level increasingly 'drift away' from European citizens' preferences. This drift is possible, because, again, policy-making at the EU level is not

scrutinised as closely as at the national level. In their concluding remarks, both authors emphasise the need to create an 'arena of political contestation', just as such arenas exist at the national level. This would, presumably, allow for EU political parties to compete over matters of European importance.

It is not the ambition of this brief contribution to solve this ongoing debate. The question of EU's democratic legitimacy is likely to remain on the academic agenda. However, it is important to point out that the analytical critique of the EU's democratic legitimacy, as provided by Follesdal and Hix (2006), analyses the EU using tools of comparative politics. These tools have been designed for analysing the political systems of states only. If the EU were a state, their analysis would be highly convincing, despite minor amendments taking the innovations in the Lisbon Treaty into account. Nonetheless, when debating the democratic deficit within the EU, or the lack thereof, it is important to remember that the EU *is not* a state – even though it shares some attributes of one, such as a common currency. It is not a self-proclaimed state by international law, nor does any other state recognise the EU as a state. In fact, it may never become a state. Yes, its attributes are clearly more advanced than generally expected from an international organisation. The EU works according to its own laws (EU laws, not international law), has a legislature (the Council and the European Parliament), and two quasi-executives with the Council and the Commission. It is a union of states and citizens according to the treaties – and thus somewhere between an international organisation (a organisation of states only) and a state (a community of citizens). Jupille and Caporaso (1998: 214) encapsulate the unique character of the EU, describing it as '*an evolving entity, composed of numerous issue areas and policy networks, neither a full-blown polity nor a system of sovereign states (…)*'. The EU remains a *sui generis* international organisation.

Therefore, the suggestion of a democratic deficit at the heart of the EU institutional system, encapsulated by the critique of Follesdal and Hix (2006), is problematic. Comparative politics analysis, while highlighting important points, is nonetheless inaccurate; it is counterproductive to draw direct analogies between the processes and institutions at domestic national levels and the EU level. This does not mean that the question of the EU's legitimacy and accountability is unimportant. Quite the opposite is the case. In fact, significant steps have been taken in the Lisbon Treaty to increase the powers of the EP. These are steps in the right direction. For instance, the principle of co-decision between the Council and the EP is referred to as the 'ordinary legislative procedure' – an obvious development that should have occurred much earlier. This represents a significant step towards greater democratic accountability of the EU, even if the elections to the EP do not really serve as the European 'arena of political contestation'. However, while this represents the correct solution, it is an answer to the wrong problem – it is not an answer for resolving the democratic deficit, which is largely a mythical construction. In fact, it is rather an answer to help create the first multi-national cosmopolitan democracy in the world.

In the absence of advocates for such a multi-national cosmopolitan democracy, Bismarck's heirs will continue to suggest that only national democracies can be truly democratic. The verdict of the German Constitutional Court on the Lisbon Treaty was clearly inspired by this nationalistic spirit. While striking down the accompanying laws required to ratify the Lisbon Treaty in Germany, the court took a heavy swing at the European Parliament by raising questions about its legitimacy and democratic viability as a democratic actor (Hoffmann, 2009). The court emphasised the fact that, in its view, the EP could not contribute to the legitimacy of the European Union. Its key criticism is based on the fact that the EP election procedure is not based on a strict one-person one-vote principle, but rather on national quotas that allocate a specific number of

seats to each member state. Whilst striking down the plaintiff's claim of the undemocratic nature of the EU, and thereby the Lisbon Treaty, the court nonetheless suggested that the European Parliament 'is not a body of representation of a sovereign European people. [...] The fundamental rule of electoral equality thus only applies within a people, not in a supranational body of representation, which remains a representation of the peoples linked to each other by the Treaties.'

The logic of the court thus suggests the following. At some point, humanity decided that democracy is only possible within a people, and here also read nation, but not within a multi-national union of people and states. Therefore, democratic legitimacy can only ever be provided by a state (whether that is an EU member state, or the EU becoming a state). Of course, this is an ahistorical and nationalist-conservative view, which adheres to a political understanding that Bismarck could have subscribed to. It is ahistorical because democracy is not a static concept – it is rather a concept that has changed throughout human development. While century-old understandings of democracy deprived different ethnic groups, wealth groups and women of the right to be a voting citizen, eventually these understandings changed to include all of these categories. Nobody today, within the European Union, would seriously seek to deprive any of these categories of people the right to vote. Democracy as a concept changed with its time – and time has changed Europe.

Europe is now a union of citizens and states, and therefore, the Union can be made democratic by constructing an appropriate concept of democracy. While comparative politics can help us do so, and thus can suggest the creation of institutions that resemble domestic institutions, international relations tools will also help. Given the character of the EU, lying between that of a state and an international organisation, its democratic legitimacy needs to be two-fold: (1) based on directly elected institutions,

such as the European Parliament, but also (2) based on nationally directly elected governments. Unless we want to create an EU state, democratically brought about by the citizens of the EU, we should aim to create and improve the first truly democratic multi-national cosmopolitan democracy in the world – the European Union.

Conclusion:
Reconnecting the European Parliament
and its People – Building trust at the EU's democratic
heart
by Adam Hug

Our contributing authors have provided a wide-ranging and informative overview of some of the critical issues facing the European Parliament's relationship with the public. They have put forward some practical solutions to help improve engagement with and trust in MEPs. This section seeks to develop those ideas, feeding in personal reflections and the findings of the project to see what can be done to (re)connect the European Parliament and its people.

Reforming the voting system

Any substantial reform of the relationship between the public and MEPs must include a root and branch rethink of how we elect our European representatives in the first place. Most participants in our seminars and surveys were agreed that a new electoral system should be introduced, although there is widespread disagreement on what an alternative system might look like.

Open or closed?

All politicians are required in some way to be selected as a candidate by their parties[19]. However, in a closed list there is no way in which the wider electorate can have a say on an individual candidate, unlike a Parliamentary election, where a perceived 'personal vote' may account for up to a few thousand votes either side of the overall party trend in an individual seat. Across an entire region, the effect of the presence of individual candidates on a particular party list makes very little difference to the overall result, except where a particular candidate has significant celebrity or

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[19] Even experiments with Open Primaries have involved a party shortlisting process.

notoriety. While MEPs and candidates campaign with the same enthusiasm as their Westminster counterparts[20], the size of the constituencies and the opaque nature of the lists make it very difficult for them to make a direct connection with the electorate.

In the current closed list system, the primary determinant of whether or not a candidate becomes an MEP is not the will of the electorate, but the view of their national parties and regional party members. As Hix, Noury and Roland argue, in the past if there was a conflict between the policy positions of national and European political leaderships, the loyalties of national groups of MEPs would tend to side with the former, as national parties hold the key to future political patronage at a national level[21]. However, where the positions of the Party leadership and rank and file diverge, this can lead to different behaviour.

It can be argued that among the reasons Labour MEPs took a more interventionist line on labour market regulations than the previous Labour government were not only tactical considerations within the PES, as suggested by Hix et al, and the call of their consciences, but that they were influenced in part by the need to be competitively placed on party lists. The views of the constituency parties and trade unionists who determine whether Labour MEPs are automatically reselected at the top of the list, and the members who rank the candidates, perhaps coincided more closely with the PES line than that of the UK Government. Furthermore, as the proportion of MEPs who do not actively seek a future career in Westminster politics is believed to be on the increase, the importance of the power of the internal electorate is likely to grow as the power of the national leadership's ability to whip further declines. It will be

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[20] It has to be said that, by and large, with the likely exception of UKIP, the enthusiasm and commitment shown to the campaign candidates is not usually matched by that of their local parties, for whom local and national elections are seen to be of much greater importance.
[21] This analysis does not also take into account that as national MEPs are drawn from national parties with their own distinct political cultures rather than European ones then they may feel a more natural affinity with the political positions of their national counterparts.

interesting to see how Conservative and Liberal Democrat MEPs react to the consensus positions on European issues that the UK coalition government will be required to put forward, and to what extent they will be willing to rebel, acting both on their own opinions and playing to their internal electorates, whose views on Europe may radically diverge from the policies of the Government. This will be the topic of a new FPC and Commission Representation project for 2010-11.

One alternative, widely supported in academia, is a form of open list system whereby voters are able to show their preferences for individual candidates within the list, thereby encouraging MEPs to connect more directly to the voters who will have a clearer say in determining their election. However this is certainly not without its problems.

A completely open list on the current constituencies is a non-starter even if the UK media were to undergo a Damascene conversion to the cause of publicising and analysing European elections and individual candidates. It seems unlikely that most voters have either the time or enthusiasm to weigh up the individual merits of what could, in larger regions, be an unfeasibly large number of candidates. For example, in 2009 there were 133 candidates standing for the European Parliament in the South East Region for 10 seats on behalf of 15 different parties, while even in the smallest region, the North East, there were 35 candidates. While a changed system might encourage parties to put forward fewer candidates, this still creates an immense challenge for the voter to make an informed choice. The editor's experience of counting ballot papers in multiple member local council elections leads him to the conclusion that there is an element of randomness in the casting of multiple ballots against a long list of candidates and the risk of alphabetical bias is high, whereby candidates with surnames higher up the alphabet gain a slight advantage over those lower in the list (something sure to vex the likes of Marina Yannakoudakis MEP). Even with a

semi-open list, that most advocates of such a system prefer, where voter choice needs to reach a certain level to overturn a party list order, randomness could still play a major part unless a second problem was to occur.

Simon Hix and Sara Hagemann point out that in a large electoral district with an open list system, elections would be fought as 'national beauty contests between high profile personalities rather than party political campaigns'[22]. Such a method would undoubtedly lead to a skewing of the results, as Richard Corbett also argues, toward candidates with a higher media profile, which in the present environment tends to be those who are already celebrities (Robert Kilroy-Silk's adventures in the European Parliament highlight some of the risks of this route, though Michael Cashman provides a good counter example), or those whose views are deemed to be most controversial (such as Daniel Hannan or Nick Griffin[23]). If MEPs were able to gain greater coverage for their work, this problem would lessen, however the problems of cohesion within the regional MEP group would remain. This paper therefore would argue that while there may be some benefits to introducing a semi-open list in smaller constituencies, the scale of the caveats should encourage the search for more radical solutions.

Scrapping the lists

While it may seem an odd claim to make when some other European countries still select their MEPs at a national level, the size of the UK's regional voting areas are too large to enable the practice of representative democracy in a manner that goes with the grain of British political culture. Across the UK, there are 72 seats for an electorate of 45,315,669, thereby creating a nationwide average of

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[22] Although their suggestion of ideal district size runs from 4-10 raising the problem identified above.
[23] It cannot be stressed enough that this is not an attempt to create an equivalence between the political views of the two MEPs in question but merely noting their ability to generate coverage through different forms of controversy.

629,384 eligible voters per MEP.[24] However, it is not that simple for the MEPs because, while there are some informal arrangements within parties to divide up responsibilities in a region, MEPs are meant to represent the entire region and this can range from the challenging 1.14 million voters in Northern Ireland and 1.94 million in the North East to the frankly ludicrous 6.23 million in the South East. This compares to an average of 68,175 voters per Westminster Parliamentary seat under the current model, although this may soon rise.

When combined with the findings of the survey results on MEP contact rate, there seems to be a compelling argument to explore ways to reduce the constituency size. Furthermore, as the UK's new coalition government has decided to abolish the Government Office regional structure on which the European Parliament's constituencies are based, there would be no requirement for new smaller units to necessarily fit within the current regional boundaries.

A new system

It is with some trepidation that this paper puts forward a different way of doing things. A different system would need to work on a reduced constituency size to make them more manageable for MEPs to represent and to strengthen the local links between constituents and representatives. At the same time, it must retain proportionality to satisfy the requirements of European law and retain the scope for the full range of voter preferences to be taken into account.

The system that seems most effectively to meet those two requirements would be a form of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system, the most proportional type of Additional Member System (AMS). Under this proposal, a number of individual single member constituencies, several

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[24] BBC News, European Election 2009: UK Results
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/ukregion_999999.stm

per current European Parliament Region, would be created and with candidates chosen either by a First past the post plurality or Alternative Vote (AV), depending on the outcome of the proposed referendum for UK elections. This would be combined with a national top-up list[25] to take into account the results of the constituency elections and make the overall result proportional to the number of votes cast across the country. Variants of this system currently operate in Scotland, Wales and London, where constituency representatives are combined with MEPs selected on a regional list. However, in a European context, where the number of MEPs cannot increase, making the top-up list national rather than regional would enable the constituency size to be as small as possible while retaining overall proportionality.

The rules setting out the type of electoral systems permissible for the national conduct of European elections found in a 2002 EU Council Decision updating the Electoral Act[26]. There are two key sections that pertain to the system that can be used:

- Article 2 that states '*in each Member State, members of the European Parliament shall be elected on the basis of proportional representation using the list system or the single transferable vote*.'
- Article 3 which says '*in accordance with its specific national situation, each Member State may establish constituencies for elections to the European Parliament or subdivide its electoral area in a different manner, without generally affecting the proportional nature of the voting system*.'

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[25] Given the disproportionate concentration of the Scottish and Welsh nationalists relative to their share of the UK-wide vote, in practice this could broken down by the UK's constituent nations with Northern Ireland its retaining its STV system.
[26] European Council Decision of 25th June and 23rd September 2002 amending the act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Decision76/787/ECSC, EC; Euroatom 2002/772/EC, Euroatom
http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2002:283:0001:0004:EN:PDF

The editor is very grateful to Dr Wilhelm Lehmann from the European Parliament's Department of Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs who has very kindly provided some advice on the application of these two articles to this proposal. He has said, in a strictly personal capacity, that an MMP system would be generally considered proportional and the Electoral Act provides some flexibility on the types of list that could be used but that any definitive answer would need to be provided by a ruling of the Electoral Commission with, in case of a complaint, possible reference to national courts and the EU Court of Justice. He confirmed that further regionalisation in the UK (to smaller constituencies) would in his opinion not be in conflict with the Electoral Act.

This proposal would comprise a national list element to the voting system, however were the interpretation of Article 2 to require the use of a list throughout the system, this proposal could with operate party lists in the individual single member constituencies. While such a local list could be used if deemed necessary for such a system to meet the requirements of the European Electoral Act, it would have the added advantage of retaining overall proportionality if an MEP stood down for any reason, which would otherwise trigger a by-election whose result at a different time in the political cycle might affect the proportionality of the original vote. If a local list system was to be used, it would be important for the lead candidate on each party list to be identified on the ballot paper as well as the full list including the reserve candidates to be displayed at polling stations.

If a two box local and national ballot was deemed too confusing, a single local vote could be used to determine the composition of the national list through a secondary mandate, although the voter's choice of local lead candidate may of course differ from their wider party preference. Such a one vote option could work on the basis of AV within an individual constituency, but where the first preference votes counted towards the national list.

Alternative, though in the editor's view less preferable, systems could include breaking the current regions down into smaller, multiple member constituencies[27] that could be elected by a Single Transferable Vote (STV), as currently takes place in Northern Ireland, or on the basis of a semi-open list as dealt with above and advocated by Andrew Duff and Simon Hix. Again, if it was felt that breaking every region into smaller constituencies was preventing certain parties from gaining representation equivalent to their share of the vote, a national top-up list could again be employed to correct local imbalances. Any change to the system in the UK would require an act of Parliament to amend the 1999 European Elections Act.

Engaging the media

MEPs and the European Parliament face a massive challenge getting their voices heard by a UK media that often sees European issues as someone else's responsibility and gives them little attention. At our London launch event for this project, The Economist's Europe Editor John Peet pointed out that his Brussels Correspondent was one of only three full time staff journalists for UK newspapers based in the EU's capital. We have been separately informed that there is only one UK-based journalist solely employed by a news organisation on EU issues, the journalist managing the relevant section of the BBC website. Our survey highlighted the extent to which even interested respondents struggled to remember a positive news story about the European Parliament, with only 31% claiming to have heard any good news at all.

So, what to do? Showing journalists how European legislation can have an impact on people's lives in the UK, thereby making a newsworthy story, is a constant challenge. While many journalists do understand the implications of European issues, there is a continual

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[27] Regions that are currently relatively small, most notably the North East could stay the same size.

struggle to encourage the local and national media that the majority of issues facing MEPs are not foreign affairs issues to be dealt with solely by an international or Europe correspondent, but have a real impact on policy and political issues that they deal with on a daily basis. The overall level of understanding amongst journalists is low and the different style of politics causes problems. At the Edinburgh seminar it was noted that local papers sometimes argue they cannot report on the actions of one MEP without getting representatives from the other parties to comment, in order to preserve political balance.[28]

The two person team at the UK Office of the European Parliament work hard to get UK journalists to engage with the Parliament and MEPs running briefings, engagement meetings and sending press releases, however they need more ammunition to help shift British journalistic culture. They run a UK-wide series of sessions with local media and regional MEPs, work with trainee journalists and set up Brussels briefing trips tailored to the local or specific policy needs of participants. However, their capacity can clearly only allow them to do so much.

There remain major challenges for the Parliament and MEPs, perhaps through their political groups, in reaching out to the editors, who ultimately decide what gets printed or goes on screen, and the publishers who set the tone for their publications and the commentators who lead the paper's opinion pages. Furthermore, increasing the Parliament Office's capacity to work with MEP assistants, giving them guidance and support in drafting Eurospeak-free press releases, finding news hooks and identifying media opportunities for their bosses could help to reduce the number of journalists immediately filing press releases from MEPs in the recycle bin. To help get their voices heard by the media, John Peet recommended that MEPs should

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[28] This requirement for political balance can also restrict opportunities for MEPs to speak at local authority or school events, where it may not be feasible to arrange for MEPs from all political parties to attend at the same event or commit to future appearances.

position themselves as commentators to local and national media on European Summits and other EU events outside the strict remit of the Parliament.

Engaging the UK's Parliaments and people in European decision-making

Whatever the reader's pre-disposition towards the Lisbon Treaty and the methods through which it came into being, one of the positive elements, that both supporters and critics agreed on in our seminar series are the provisions under Protocol 2[29] to give national parliaments (and by extension the devolved institutions) a greater say in EU decision making. How national governments respond to the opportunities it provides may well determine whether its long-term democratic benefits outweigh the bad feeling engendered by the decision of the UK and other national governments to implement it through the representative democracy of parliaments rather than a direct public vote.

First, Lisbon gives national parliaments the ability to comment on so-called 'draft legislative acts'[30] for an eight week grace period before they are debated by the other European institutions. Officially this provision is only to give the view of national parliaments on the suitability of taking action on an issue at the European rather than national (or sub-national) level – the principle of subsidiarity. Under new powers, if one third of national parliaments oppose the proposed legislation, a 'yellow card' is issued which acts to return the proposal to the Commission for revision, and if half of all national parliaments are against an idea and have the support of either the Council or the European Parliament, the issue is dropped. However, in practice it can give an opportunity for the UK's Parliaments to more

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[29] Official Journal of the European Union, Protocol on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union, December 2007, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:0148:0150:EN:PDF
[30] Proposals from the Commission such as directives or regulations, initiatives from the council, groups of member states, the Court of Justice, the ECB, the European Investment Bank or from the European Parliament itself.

formally scrutinise proposed EU legislation at an earlier stage of the policy-making process in Brussels. President Barroso made it clear that he expected national parliaments will debate and comment on the substance of proposed European legislation, as well as subsidiarity, in a letter to the President of the Council. He stated that:

"As the subsidiarity control mechanism will be applied alongside the political dialogue, which covers all aspects of those documents transmitted to national Parliaments, and not only compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission invites national Parliaments to distinguish in their opinions as far as possible between subsidiarity aspects and comments on the substance of a proposal, and to be as clear as possible as regards their assessment on a proposal's compliance with the principle of subsidiarity. However, the Commission is of course fully aware of the fact that each national parliament chooses its own way to work as well as the format in which it will send its reasoned opinions to the Commission."[31]

It is interesting to note that, despite the interest shown in this new opportunity at our seminars around the country, at present the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee does not envisage the new provisions leading to radical changes to its working practices. The European Scrutiny Committee currently provides around 500 reports to Parliament and UK ministers on the implications of European legislation, while its counterpart in the Lords, the EU Select Committee, is able to go into much greater detail with seven sub-Committees exploring specific policy areas. While such diligent work in the Lords is to be welcomed, developing greater activity across the elected chamber on these issues is of great importance, not only to the

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[31] National Assembly for Wales, European and External Affairs Committee, Discussion paper: Implications for the National Assembly for Wales of the Protocol on Subsidiarity and Proportionality (Protocol no.2) contained in the Lisbon Treaty, January 2010, http://www.cynulliadcymru.org/en/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-previous-committees/bus-committees-second-eur-home/bus-committees-second-eur-agendas.htm?act=dis&id=165407&ds=2/2010

democratic accountability of the EU, but of the governance of the UK that is in part shaped by the implementation of completed EU legislation.

While understanding the capacity issues that House of Commons Select Committees face, there would be distinct benefits from encouraging individual Select Committees to see it as part of their responsibility to scrutinise elements of draft EU legislation during this eight week window so that those with expertise on the issues at hand can tailor responses. This would also help 'mainstream' European issues across Parliament, encouraging UK politicians to develop views on European legislation long before it arrives for implementation.

Westminster currently holds three meetings a year that bring together MPs, Peers and MEPs, and while this it to be welcomed, opportunities to deepen this relationship should be explored. This might include Nick Clegg's suggestion of a joint Parliamentary Committee comprising MPs, Peers and MEPs[32], or letting MEPs participate in Select Committees in some form. Alternatively, and perhaps less ambitiously, an Associate Parliamentary Group could be formed to bring them together on a more regular basis and encourage local cooperation.

Any impetus behind these new provisions could be used to help build public awareness of European legislation and the role of the European Parliament. During the 8 week consultation period and beyond, it would be hugely beneficial for the four UK Parliaments[33] to more proactively promote any discussions on EU matters to encourage input not only from stakeholder groups, who may be well versed in engaging with domestic parliaments but lack knowledge of activities in Brussels, but also to the wider public.

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[32] Such a committee would need to be non voting.
[33] The devolved institutions have the ability to debate draft legislative acts and give a reasoned opinion to Westminster on the impact on subsidiarity. However the onus is on them to lead on this process and Westminster does not plan to necessarily wait for those institutions to address these matters before giving its reasoned opinion on its own timetable.

Creating publicity around debates at a UK level might also help generate interest for the issue as it passes through the European Parliament. Whether the opportunity provided by the Lisbon changes is taken is a matter of political will and Parliamentary capacity.

The second area, touched on in the Lisbon protocol, that could help strengthen links between the different levels of government, is an attempt to develop the formal role of what is known as the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC). This body brings together representatives of European Scrutiny Committees from every chamber of all national parliaments across the EU. The Lisbon Treaty outlines the ability for COSAC to formally submit matters for the attention of the European Parliament and set up inter-parliamentary conferences to further strengthen the links between Parliaments.

One of the possible options put forward by Rt Hon Denis MacShane MP at our London seminar was the possible creation of a second chamber, a 'Senate' of the European Parliament, comprised of representatives of national parliaments, an idea that raised its head during the ill-fated Convention on the Future of Europe. Such an idea would certainly bring national parliaments and the European Parliaments closer together, but there would be significant practical challenges freeing up enough MP time to engage with a formal second chamber, and the scheme has previously met with considerable political opposition. Irrespective of the merits of such a scheme, to formally create such a body would require treaty change, something that would not meet with much sympathy from European leaders following their travails over Lisbon. Nevertheless, it might be able to strengthen and adapt COSAC to such a point where national politicians could exercise a meaningful advisory (or even scrutiny) role in relation to the European Parliament, albeit without the formal power to block or amend its actions. The body could meet on a more regular

basis and delegations could be comprised in a manner more proportionate to the size of country population, rather than the current formula of three representatives per chamber of Parliament in each country, in the case of the UK the current European Scrutiny and Lords European Union Committees. Over time it could even develop beyond its current 'Committee of Committees' role with its members drawn from across the legislatures rather than be drawn from the existing Committees. Inter-parliamentary collaboration is far from a panacea for the lack of public understanding and trust in the European Parliament, in no small part because Westminster has problems of its own. Nevertheless, it can help provide a platform for national debate on issues of relevance to the European Parliament and help encourage collaboration between institutions, strengthening the legitimacy and understanding of European law-making.

During the 2010 Labour Leadership Campaign, David Miliband proposed the inclusion of the leader of Labour's group of MEPs into the Shadow Cabinet. Such proposals show the increasing awareness of the need to join up decision-making between elected representatives at all levels and bring the work of the European Parliament more clearly into everyday political decision making.

Starting when young

To enable a greater understanding of the role and importance of the European Parliament, it is important that children have the opportunity to meaningfully discuss some of the issues as part of the Citizenship curriculum in schools. In England, issues related to voting are currently addressed at Key Stage 3 (for years 7-9, age 11-13) in Unit 06: Government, elections and voting[34], where students are asked to 'list reasons for and against voting at local, national and EU level' and to consider why 'they think that

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[34] The Standards Site, Dfes, http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/citizenship/?view=get

people are less likely to vote in local and EU elections than general elections?' When students reach Key Stage 4 (years 10-11, age 14-16), they are able to take Unit 11 Europe - Who decides? This sets out the big picture discussions around the UK's membership of the European Union. Any forthcoming reform of English citizenship education should include discussions of what the European Parliament does and the role of the MEPs they will soon be able to elect, perhaps as part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum. It is important to ensure discussions on these matters should form part of the curriculum in the other three nations.

Credibility of the Parliament

The monthly farce of the European Parliament's migration to Strasbourg undermines the institution's credibility and sows confusion amongst voters about what the Parliament is supposed to be doing, at a cost to European taxpayers of around £200 million per year. Repeated attempts have been made by MEPs to eliminate or reduce the frequency of the migration to Strasbourg, including coordinated action by the OneSeat campaign. However, at every turn this has been blocked by the French. The diplomatic challenge however, will be persuading France to accept a deal without giving way on other issues such as the CAP.

Back in 2003, Clegg and Van Hulten suggested Strasbourg as a venue for an annual meeting of MEPs and MPs. Following the recent reforms, this idea could be developed into creating an Alsatian home for the beefed-up COSAC suggested here. There might be an outside chance that the Parliamentary Assemblies of other international organisations including the OSCE[35] and NATO could be encouraged to make a permanent home in the current Parliament building. Similarly, there may be scope to encourage the Council of Europe, also based in Strasbourg, to make use of current European Parliament facilities.

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[35] The presence of non-EU former post-Soviet states may make this a tricky option.

Transforming this historic city from the home to a 'travelling circus' of the European Parliament to a more developed role as the meeting place of national parliaments could be a solution that helps France and the rest of the EU move forward in a dignified fashion.

However, if moral arguments and compromise offers continue to fail, more radical action may eventually be required. One option for further protest could use the European Parliament's requirement for a third of MEPs to be present in the chamber for quoracy to be achieved.[36] Such a manoeuvre would need to be carefully managed as it would require 40 MEPs to be present to call for the President to assess the quoracy figures (the President can only take a unilateral count if there are less than 40 MEPs in the chamber, something unlikely to be achieved with the French delegation present). If it was possible to coordinate, such a measure could draw wider attention to this ongoing problem.

Similarly, while there has been some reform in recent years, particularly to travel allowances, there is scope for further reform to the expenses system. The cost of being a parliamentarian operating across three countries while representing an entire region very clearly places resource requirements on MEPs above and beyond that of most national politicians. However, there is a legitimate concern about the extent to which MEPs' office expenses exceed those of their national counterparts, with a staffing budget of 212,288 euros[37] (£176,700.70) while MPs at Westminster have to work within a newly reduced figure of £109,548 [38]for three and a half members of staff who are likely to be dealing with more casework. While there may be some room for a reduction in the European Parliament figure,

[36] Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, December 2009, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+RULES-EP+20091201+RULE-155+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN&navigationBar=YES

[37] Andrew Duff MEP, 2009 Annual Report, http://www.andrewduffmep.org.uk/pages/Office.html

[38] IPSA, IPSA – the facts, June 2010 http://www.ipsa-home.org.uk/docs/IPSA%20-%20the%20facts%20160610.pdf

particularly if there is the reduction in constituency size recommended earlier, the real challenge will be to make further steps to ensure the system is not abused. Richard Corbett rightly argues for the parliament to make the use of the general expenses allowance more transparent and accountable by making the production of receipts mandatory.

Developing public understanding of politics at the European level is a common goal for many observers. More sceptical observers, most notably Open Europe, argue for a more adversarial politics to engage the public. While confrontation is good for generating column inches, it is not necessarily the best atmosphere for policy-making or for encouraging the public to engage with the Parliament.

Measures to promote the greater competition of political ideas must be married to the existing culture of bi-partisan cooperation that is one of the European Parliament's more appealing features. The challenge is to find ways of sharpening the public and media understanding of policy differences without creating a much more partisan system that could lead to legislative log-jam. Measures to enable right of reply in European Parliamentary debates may help make the discussion a more interesting spectacle for outside observers.

Despite the expansion of co-decision making to the Parliament under the Lisbon Treaty, there may still be scope for the further transfer of powers from the appointed Commission to the directly elected Parliament, which will help underpin the democratic foundations of the EU. Perhaps giving the Parliament limited powers to initiate legislation, akin to private members bills from the backbenches in the UK, may be worth considering. Any arguments for or against increasing the power of the Parliament at the expense of the power of the Council and member states are very much a matter for another

publication[39] and one that should be considered on the basis of the most appropriate forum for decision-making rather than increasing the legitimacy of the European Parliament.

Moving forward

For all the problems highlighted here, the EU is far more democratically accountable than any other international intergovernmental body, with the Parliament carrying far more weight than the Parliamentary Assemblies of NATO, the Council of Europe or OSCE, whose memberships partially overlap. However, this is no excuse for complacency, as in turn, the EU wields far more influence, and indeed control, over the actions of its constituent members than any other comparable organisation.

The types of decisions being made at a European level are often either very strategic or rather technical, so do not lend themselves easily to everyday consumption. In certain regions, the European debates around Structural Funds or fisheries genuinely do form an important part of the domestic political debate with a degree of public awareness but in others, where fishing quotas have less of an impact on everyday life, these topics do not register on the radar. Getting news coverage and enthusing the public about the work of the Parliament will be a constant struggle and nothing suggested here could claim to be a silver bullet that puts this right. While voluntary organisations, trade unions, business associations, local councils and other representative groups can play an important role in fostering debate and awareness, they cannot be an alternative to improving the direct relationship between MEPs and their electorates.

The Parliament is an evolving institution that for the last 21 years has provided a democratic underpinning to the European Union. Although even some pro-European

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[39] Strengthening the power of the Parliament to approve individual Commissioners and possible initiation of legislation are the two main deviation from this principle in this section.

observers that have engaged with this project have expressed their objections to the existence of the institution, believing it to be unworkable, this is certainly not the view of the editor or the others who have contributed to this pamphlet. The challenge is to harness the momentum needed for reform at both the national and European level to strengthen the EU's directly elected pillar by building deeper connections between the Parliament, its MEPs and the people they represent.

Recommendations for action

This pamphlet presents a number of recommendations in order help reconnect the European Parliament with its people.

- **Fundamentally reform the electoral system that chooses MEPs.** The creation of smaller constituencies is essential. The editor advocates the introduction of a Mixed Member Proportional system that creates individual local constituencies and ensures proportionality through a national top-up list. STV or Semi-Open lists might be an improvement on the current system but only on the basis of smaller constituencies.

- **Expand the capacity of the Parliament's UK media team.** This could to enable them to reach out to editors and publishers and provide training and support for MEP's assistants in media engagement and drafting press releases. Also encourage MEPs to comment on wider EU issues to raise their profiles.

- **Bring the debate to Westminster, Holyrood, Cardiff Bay and Stormont**. Use rights under the Lisbon Treaty to strengthen domestic Parliamentary scrutiny of EU draft legislation. Encourage individual Select Committees to look at EU legislation more regularly and improve working with MEPs. Explore the option for a joint committee or group of MPs, MEPs and Peers. Reform and strengthen COSAC so that it can play a meaningful role advising and scrutinising the European Parliament.

- **Make the European Parliament more credible and engaging**. Further reform expenses and move to end the Strasbourg migration. Enable MEPs to veto individual Commissioners rather than en masse and explore a limited ability to initiate legislation.

Introduce a right of reply in Parliamentary debates and record MEPs comments and voting in committee[40].

- **Talk about the European Parliament in schools**. Look at putting information about the Parliament in the Key Stage 4 Citizenship curriculum.

- **Richard Corbett argues** to increase the role of MEPs in nominating the Commission President and Commissioners and he calls for MEPs to keep receipts for their general allowance spending.

- **Michael Shackleton believes** that the Citizen's Initiative should allow issues outside the Commission's competence to amass the required signatures to encourage debate and that MPs should be held to account for their engagement with EU legislation at Westminster.

- **Liz Atkins calls** for an effective response process to petitions under the Citizen's Initiative with a maximum 3 month wait for a reply. The AGORA should be annual with greater civil society involvement. There should be a compact between the EU and the voluntary sector, setting out opportunities for participation in decision-making, similar to the UK version. A European Parliament Civil Society Intergroup should be formed and a 'Civil Society House' set up in Brussels.

- **Dr Adam Marshall says** MEPs and local Chambers of Commerce should set up at least annual meetings between the two groups, following the example of North Staffordshire. National MEP engagement events could be attached to the biennial European Parliament of Enterprises. Businesses should conduct

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[40] This last point was proposed by Open Europe in their 2009 publication.

training to gain a better understanding of the Parliament. MEPs should get more coverage on regional television, perhaps with a duty on public service broadcasting to achieve this. MEPs should have ISDN lines to make it easier for them to get on the air and they work with their party groups to more effectively coordinate political messages with local and national politicians.

- **Cllr Flo Clucas** argues for the strengthening of the Committee of the Regions[41] and for greater direct links between the Parliament and the LGA. She makes the case for the retention of Structural Funds to keep the link between the EU, local government and the public.

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[41] Fundamental reform of both the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee must form part of a wider agenda to improve how the EU in general engages with local government, business and voluntary sector stakeholders but due to reasons of space and direct relevance it is not addressed here.

Reconnecting the European Parliament and its People is the culmination of a year long project between the Foreign Policy Centre and the European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom. Edited by FPC Policy Director Adam Hug, the pamphlet includes contributions from Dr Richard Corbett, Dr Michael Shackleton, Liz Atkins, Dr Adam Marshall, Cllr Flo Clucas, Dr Christian Kaunert and Kamil Zwolski.

The pamphlet argues that there is clearly room for improvement in the way MEPs and the Parliament engage with the British public and a need to reform the electoral system. The report seeks to provide positive recommendations for action that help strengthen the bond between the European Parliament and the people it represents.

The Foreign Policy Centre

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