

Current life and work of the European Parliament

EMiL news

September sees the return of EU institutions from the August break, with the next few months promising to be full of legislative initiatives and significant developments on a variety of fronts.

EMiL kicks off autumn with a new look for our newsletter, introduced by The European's new editor, Daisy Cross. We warmly welcome her and wish her good luck and hope to receive contributions from as many of our members as possible.

We also start autumn with the first dinner with one of London's MEP, Ms Marina Yanakoudakis. We have many more dinners and events planned so watch this space and join us in our future activities.

The European Parliament went back to work at the end of August for a busy schedule of Political Group and Committee meetings plus 2 Strasbourg plenary sessions in September.

We have had a visit from Bronislaw Komorowski, the new President of Poland, an increasingly important player in the EU.

On the external front there has of course been a focus on the disastrous flooding in Pakistan and EU assistance, as well as the new EU foreign service. As work on the EU's 2011 budget is finalised, thoughts turn to the longer-term question of the size, shape and source of EU funding. European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso made his first ever 'State of the [European] Union' address, rightly stressing the need for structural reforms and better economic coordination to create sustainable growth and jobs.

In my own busy field of justice & home affairs, we will soon begin examination of

new legislative proposals for a 'European Investigation Order' to make cross-border police work easier and for a 'letter of rights' for anyone arrested in the EU. I'm glad that at last defence rights, like the interpretation measure I steered through before the summer recess, are balancing the strengthening of prosecution facilities, long a demand of the ALDE group to which UK LibDems belong. I am glad to have the opportunity to meet both immigration minister Damian Green and Justice Secretary Ken Clarke this month to discuss EU business.

The Commission's new proposals for the transfer of airline passengers' personal details to the US and within the EU are imminent. Just like on the SWIFT agreement on banking data, Liberals will be vigilant on the privacy front.

Furthermore I expect follow-up to 2 debates: one condemning the wave of anti-Roma 'voluntary' expulsions, this time from France, with Sarkozy copying Berlusconi in 'playing the race card', and the other demanding action on cross-border legal recognition of same-sex couples.

All and all it is going to be a busy Autumn, with the European Parliament on the

forefront of legislative activity in the service of EU citizens.

Sarah Ludford MEP, Liberal Democrat MEP for London

Estonia and the Euro

Estonia's imminent adoption of the Euro, making it the Eurozone's 17th member, will hold clear benefits for all parties involved – current Eurozone members, future members and, of course, Estonia itself.

To say that the Eurozone, and the EU as a whole, has been in a bit of turmoil lately would be an understatement. The events of late 2009 and early 2010, are fresh in everybody's memory, and what the Eurozone needs now is a positive case.

“The Euro will have a positive effect on the self-confidence of Estonia’s economy and its position in global financial markets”

Estonia serves as just that. Government debt is under control, the budget is balanced, the economy stable, the inflation criteria met. So, above all else, Estonia has proven that fulfilling the Maastricht criteria (and by extension abiding to the Stability and Growth Pact rules) is possible, even under the current global fiscal and financial “challenging circumstances”.

Furthermore the enlargement of the Eurozone demonstrates to EU citizens that the project of monetary integration has not run out of steam. In the contrary, EU Member States remain committed to joining the single currency. Last but not least, Estonia serves as a good example to other potential Eurozone members that aspire to join the single currency sooner rather than later.

So how will Estonia benefit from its membership of the single currency? Estonia is a small and open economy. Adopting a currency with the international clout of the euro will have a positive effect on the self-confidence of its economy and its position in global financial markets, making it a more attractive destination for foreign direct investment. The euro will also facilitate the increase of trade between Estonia and its EU partners, by removing exchange rate uncertainty. In addition, adoption of the euro will safeguard the value of savings and remove the risk of sudden interest rate increases on loans. Also, having the euro will enable Estonians to make better use of the EU single market, allowing them to shop, travel and do business across borders without the extra cost of exchange rate commission fees. Bank transaction costs will also decrease significantly.

I have intentionally left for last the most significant benefit of membership of a monetary union like the Eurozone. Joining the Euro will provide Estonia with the opportunity to participate in the EU monetary policy decision making process together with other Eurozone members, bringing to the table its tradition of budgetary discipline. What else can a country of 1,3 million inhabitants ask for than the chance to take part in shaping the future of a global reserve currency like the euro?

Estonia is ready for the euro and its membership of the single currency could not come at a better time for the country itself and the EU as a whole.

Sten Schwede - Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

EU Register could be friend to lobbyists

The financial crisis has done much to damage the reputation of decision makers across the world, electorates setting ministerial effigies alight with accusations of economic mishandling and legislative incompetence, and has shaken the confidence of the many that supposed higher matters were safe in the hands of the born-to-rule elected.

Political corruption has also had a hand in furthering the gap between the electorate and their politicians, a key example being the UK expenses scandal which exposed the less attractive side of politics; the steady, unrelenting trickle of data leaving no party unaffected.

On 2nd September the German weekly WirtschaftsWoche revealed that former EU Enterprise Commissioner Günter Verheugen had set up his own EU lobby consultancy firm two months after his term ended, without informing the Commission, and former EU Internal Market Commissioner Charlie McCreevy, known for his soft-touch approach to financial markets, recently took a post at budget airline Ryanair.

It will become ever more difficult for EU officials to keep their hands clean, with the revolving door between the institutions and private sector keeping the lobby groups of Brussels topped up with former politicians.

So how can Brussels clean up its act and clarify the decision making process in the face of rising scepticism?

The European Commission has had a 'Register of Interest representatives' in

place since 2008, and has since amassed a list of 3,060 representatives, but participation is voluntary, leaving visible holes in the register. Only 15 of the participants are law firms, for instance, the legal lobby maintaining that statutory client confidentiality rules prevent them from disclosing the names of their lobbying clients without client consent. Religious representation has the lowest number of signatories; only 12 churches, religious groups and "communities of conviction" have signed up so far.

The detail required to satisfy the register is superficial – signatories are not required to disclose donors or funding, for example. Without knowing the source of the funding, it is unlikely that officials will know the motivations behind the attempt to influence and the register can have only a limited effect on lobbying transparency without this information.

The system of the European Parliament is equally light-touch but it has a mandatory element to it, with lobbyists having to register before they

receive a badge allowing them access to EP buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg. The Commission and the EP have been in talks since May with the intention to create

“The detail required to satisfy the register is superficial – signatories are not required to disclose donors or funding”

a common register for the two institutions. The Council, which did not take part in the talks initially, just announced that it will review plans to establish a single register for all three institutions, a development that might pay the way for a more robust, and maybe even mandatory, system of keeping in check lobbying activities in the capital of the EU.

Despite the current system's shortfalls, the existence of the Commission's lobby register - and recent inter-institutional efforts to create a common register - are steps in the right direction, illustrating some will to make the lobbying process more transparent. But obligatory participation in the current and future registers, and mandatory disclosure of signatory funding, will give the register the credibility it needs to make a real difference.

A strong register and a transparent system will be good both for the EU institutions and the lobby industry.

Daisy Cross

The pressure's on for economic governance task force

Efforts to reform the economic governance of the EU continue but disagreement between Member States is

causing delays. At the heart of the confrontation is Van Rompuy's Task-Force, formed back in spring at the height of the Greek sovereign debt crisis, to devise new crisis management mechanisms and make proposals for reforming the Stability and Growth Pact. The Task-Force, which is made up of Ministers and officials from Member States has, according to reports, been bogged down by disagreements between some key players, who are having difficulties reconciling their opposing views.

The most contentious issue surrounds Stability and Growth Pact sanctioning. Member States disagree on several issues, namely what kind of sanctions will be imposed, when they would be imposed, which parts of the EU budget they would apply to, and who will decide when sanctions are to be imposed.

“Some Member States have proposed that sanctions should go as far as suspending the voting rights of those that breach the Pact’s rules”

Germany is keen for strict sanctions, in the hope they'll deter Member States from breaking the Pact's rules. The Germans also argue that these sanctions should apply to all Member States, not just those

that are part of the Eurozone, an idea the UK resists.

The most difficult issue is that of the nature of the sanctions. Apart from the idea of suspending receipt of EU funds and other budget related penalties, some Member States have proposed that sanctions should go as far as suspending the voting rights of those that breach the Pact's rules. But such a provision would probably require the amendment of the EU Treaty, an exercise that most Member States will be keen to avoid repeating so soon after the conclusion of the very long and laborious process of treaty change that produced the Lisbon treaty.

Germany, who was at the centre of efforts to stop the Greek crisis from spreading across the Eurozone and effectively bankrolled the rescue plan, is growing impatient with the slow progress the Task-Force is making. It was originally agreed that the Task-Force was going to produce its final report by mid September. But the Belgian Presidency of the EU announced this week that Mr Van Rompuy will at this stage only present an interim report to EU leaders. According to the new timetable Ministers will continue debating the issues until mid-October, after which the Task-Force will be expected to produce its final recommendations.

[European Movement in London](#)

Characteristic of the mood towards the Task-Force is an editorial in the Financial Times Deutschland, which criticised the Task-Force for its lack of concrete proposals, and suggested that the European Commission, rather than an ad-hoc meeting of politicians, should be charged with developing proposals, given its experience drawing up legislative initiatives. The Commission is actually already working on preparing such proposals, which are expected to be presented by Commission President Barosso on 29 September. The fact that both the Council Task-Force and the Commission are simultaneously working on proposals to reform economic governance was seen from the beginning as a manifestation of the power struggle between the two institutions since the Lisbon treaty came into force.

If recent developments are anything to go by, the Commission could be about to have its first victory in this particular battle.

Petros Fassoulas

Date for the Diary

Friday 17 September 2010 at 19.30

**Dinner with Conservative MEP
Marina Yannakoudakis**

**Bertorelli Restaurant (19 Charlotte street,
W1T 1RL**

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