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The European Movement in London Newsletter

EMiL news

The European Movement in London together with the Embassy of Romania to the UK and the European Commission Representation in the UK organised on 14 October an event entitled 'Europe without borders - The benefits of free movement of labour in the EU'. The event featured very interesting speeches from **HE Dr. Ion Jinga**, Ambassador of Romania to the United Kingdom, **Mr Jonathan Scheele**, Head of the European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom and **Ms Jean Lambert**, Member of the European Parliament. All three speakers outlined the benefits produced, as well as the challenges posed, by the free movement of people in the EU. The event was very well attended and the speeches generated a lot of debate during the Q&A session. Many thanks to all those that took part!

Current life and work of the European Parliament

by Marina Yannakoudakis MEP (ECR, UK)

In today's global economy the European Union can play a key role in facilitating Member States' rapidly expanding areas of mutual concern. While I believe that the European Parliament (EP) has to respect Member States' individual priorities and allow certain legislation to remain as national competencies there are many areas where a united EU approach is constructive. The strengths and opportunities open to

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the United Kingdom being a member of the EU must not be overlooked or underestimated.

I am a co-ordinator for the EP's Women's Rights Committee (FEMM). Much of the committees' work deals with issues that transcend country boundaries; these require the cooperation of all EU states. Child abuse and child pornography are examples of such issues dependant upon an integrated approach at EU level. Simultaneously there is FEMM legislation, such as employment law, which I classify as a Member State competence.

The Maternity Leave Directive is coming to Plenary in October and I hope that this will be allocated under national state competency. The directive calls for compulsory full pay maternity leave across Europe which with today's economic climate is not favourable. The Impact Assessment report has indicated that the proposed directive would be severely damaging for small businesses in the UK. Furthermore, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills predicts that it would cost the UK government and businesses 2.4 billion pounds a year to facilitate the changes. This will undoubtedly affect the employment of women of child bearing age in the UK: regardless of anti-discrimination laws companies will be less inclined to employ women falling within this category for fear of the financial burden of maternity leave payment. The directive also encourages women to have children in order to boost European birth rates. This in itself is a form of

social engineering that I do not support. Finally the fact that the directive tries to set a common standard amongst states which have different needs, economies

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and cultures makes this directive unworkable.

I am also a member of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI), specialising in the area of health. When studying the pharmaceutical package, you can see the need for a united approach not only in terms of the EU, but globally. Similarly when we look at the Counterfeit Medicine Directive the checks and controls must be viewed in holistic terms. The same can be said for the Pharmacovigilance Directive where adverse reactions to medicine need to be researched, studied and the information distributed amongst all states.

Overall, my first year as an MEP has reinforced my belief that the EU has benefits for its members. However, the saying 'one size does not fit all' should always be considered as decision-making in some areas belong singularly to national governments. I feel privileged to be a Member of the European Parliament and continually enjoy my work on the ENVI and FEMM Committees. I have been elected to represent London in the EU and my top priority is to voice the views and concerns of my constituents' to the European Parliament.

Marina Yannakoudakis MEP (ECR, UK)

EP proposals for a pan-European list and co-operation with National Parliaments.

Andrew Duff MEP (ALDE, UK) who is a member of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Parliament's Rapporteur on a proposal to introduce transnational lists at the next European elections has recommended that 25 MEPs are elected in the next EP elections through a transnational list.

According to his proposals voters across Europe will have the option to cast two votes,

one for their national candidates and one for the 25 candidates on the transnational list. The list will be set by European parties (like the EPP or ALDE) and it will be made up of candidates from different political groups, with the same 25 names in all the 27 EU Member States. Voters will be able to either vote for the list as a whole or for individual candidates on the list.

The proposals are seen by the Rapporteur as an important federalist move in an effort to infuse European Parliament elections with the sense of pan-Europeanism that the current system is lacking. At present EP election campaigns focus on national issues. It is hoped that a transnational list will, among other things, invigorate debate on European issues.

The proposals are expected to be debated in December's EP Plenary session and provided they receive the EP's backing they will require an intergovernmental conference before they come into force, a process that can prove time consuming. The aim though is to have the new rules in place before the 2014 elections.

"The European Parliament is set to promote initiatives to help National Parliaments get involved more effectively with law making at the EU level"

In a separate development, efforts are intensifying to involve National Parliaments in the EU decision making process, as envisioned by the Lisbon treaty, which gave National Parliaments more scrutiny powers over EU legislative proposals.

National Parliaments have in the past made frequent use of the Conference of European Community Affairs Committees (COSAC) and the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments to co-ordinate their position vis-à-vis the EU institutions and their legislative proposals. They have also

benefited from the 'Barosso initiative', which ensures that Commission proposals are communicated to National Parliaments at the same time they are sent to other EU institutions. The Commission has in fact actively pursued in the past few years National Parliaments' input in the decision making process, in an effort to improve further the democratic legitimacy of EU law making.

So in this context the European Parliament is set to promote initiatives to help National Parliaments get involved more effectively with law making at the EU level. Proposals, currently being prepared to be presented in November to the EP's Conference of Presidents, envision closer Committee co-operation, not just between European Affairs Committees as is currently the case but mostly between sectoral committees from National Parliaments and the European Parliament. The intention is to improve the quality of exchange between national and the European Parliament and facilitate a constructive dialogue in areas where EU legislation is needed. Furthermore co-operation will be strengthened not just between committees, but also among political groups in the national and European parliaments in an effort to ensure that co-operation does not only take place on technical matters but also on political debates.

These proposals are a good way to increase the involvement of national parliamentarians in the European decision making process and take the focus away from co-operation between governments in the Council, which tend to take place behind close doors, and towards co-operation between the directly elected national and European parliaments.

Petros Fassoulas

Will the food crisis affect CAP reform talks?

With the post 2013 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) review coming up, it will be interesting to see how the volatile commodities markets and increasing global demand for food stocks will influence reform proposals.

One day last week corn prices rose by 8.5%—corn's biggest one-day jump in three decades — and you may well have noticed price increases on everything from oranges to pine nuts in the grocers. This crisis in world food has been due to crop failures in Canada, parts of Europe, and Russia, rather than general economic turbulence, although speculation has played a role in price distortion. Drought destroyed the Russian wheat crop, the leading to a ban on grain exports, for example, contributing to a major jump in world wheat prices.

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The Commission is set to publish an ideas paper on the CAP next month, followed by concrete legislative proposals in July 2011.

Previous criticisms of the CAP have pointed to farmers being incentivised to produce crops according to their subsidisation — oil seed rape receives one of the highest subsidies, for instance — rather than responding to market demands, resulting in an inefficient market.

The CAP requires a delicate balancing act to avoid distortion. It will be interesting to see whether or not cereal crops will receive more subsidies as a result of grain shortages this year, with the grain mountains of the 80s, a favourite eurosceptic punching bag, still fresh in the minds of EU officials.

In September European agriculture ministers also clashed on the question of how to

distribute CAP payments between 'older' and 'newer' member states, with France and Germany rejecting a Polish proposal to introduce a per-hectare distribution for the subsidies.

Farmers in newer member states are currently paid according to farm size, those in the EU15 receive payments calculated using a complicated system that takes into account historic stock or crop levels. The new system is likely work in favour of new members such as Poland and Romania, whose agricultural system is made up of millions of tiny farms.

When drafting their proposals EU legislators should take under consideration the interests of consumers and at the same time be sensitive to the massive variations across the EU farming industry, not forgetting the food security problems facing the EU in the future. The CAP Reform is a unique opportunity, as well as a massive challenge, for all those involved in the decision making process, let's hope they will get it right.

Daisy Cross

Swedish election results create new political landscape.

The general elections in Sweden, held on the 19th of September 2010, led to an unclear parliamentary situation. The ruling Alliance achieved a victory and despite its inability to gain an outright majority the result signals the end of the Social Democrats dominance of the political landscape. But these elections will be remembered for the entry into the Parliament of the far-right Sweden Democrats and the effect it has had of politics and society in Sweden.

The Alliance coalition, which consists of Conservatives, Liberals, Centre and Christian Democrats increased its share of the vote to 49,3 percent. On the other hand the Red-Green coalition dropped to 43,6 percent, but

the Green party improved their individual percentage to 7 percent, making it the third biggest party in Parliament. The Sweden Democrats went from 3 percent to 5,7 percent during the elections.

The Alliance's success is mostly based on its effective and responsible handling of the economic crisis. Sweden's public finances are in good order and the Government's job policy, which was based on economic incentives to seek employment while staying clear of any radical reforms of the welfare system, was widely supported by the public.

On the other hand the Social Democrats have been very disappointed by their defeat and as the announcement of the establishment of a "crisis commission" to analyse the election results shows they have entered a period of self-scrutiny.

Commentators and voters alike argue that one of the reasons of the Social Democrats defeat was the lack of confidence in Mona Sahlin, the leader of the Social Democrats, rather than an outright disapproval of political party itself.

As far as the Sweden Democrats are concerned, the fact that Sweden now has parliamentary representation of a party which has its roots in the white power movement has been a rude awakening for mainstream politicians and has rocked the Swedes' perception of themselves. It is worth noting that voters that previously supported both major parties voted for the Sweden Democrats.

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proposal to decrease the number of seats in parliamentary committees to avoid letting the Sweden Democrats in has been seen as a step away from democratic principles. Many argue that measures to curtail their influence will end with the Sweden Democrats in the role of martyr, and point to experiences in other EU countries. For their part, the Sweden Democrats and their leader Jimmie Åkesson, have declared that they are willing to enter into discussions with the Government, but in return they want the party's positions to be reflected in decisions on core issues for the party, like immigration, security and protection of the elderly.

Having ruled out the possibility of cooperating with the Sweden Democrats, the Alliance has approached the Green Party in an effort to avoid been held hostage by the populist Sweden Democrats in areas where their political intentions are seen as a particular threat. The Alliance's proposals to the Greens are mainly focused on cooperation on issues like immigration, integration and human rights. The Green Party which was initially reluctant to cooperate with the Alliance, has now altered their position. However, the Green Party insists on maintaining its autonomy with respect to other policy areas and has declared its loyalty to the other two red-green parties and its intention to remain part of the opposition forces. Having said that, it is worth keeping in mind that the red-green opposition would have to co-operate with the Sweden Democrats to bring down the new Alliance Government.

In this context the governing Alliance will continue to rule for the coming four years, but it will be a minority government this time. On 5 October the Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, announced the new government policy priorities and its composition. He also indicated that discussions on policy will be held with the Green Party and with the Social Democrats where appropriate, throughout the life time of this Parliament.

With regards to the EU, PM Reinfeldt says that "Sweden must be at the heart of the EU". He also referred to Sweden's enlargement friendly stance and expressed support for a common EU foreign and security policy.

As far as the composition of the new government is concerned, there are only a few changes among the ministers in the new government. Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, Minister of Finance, Anders Borg, Minister for Development Cooperation, Gunilla Carlsson and the Minister for EU-affairs, Birgitta Ohlsson will remain in their positions.

In conclusion the Swedish election outcome has set the scene for a new political landscape. The poor result of the Social Democrats indicates perhaps the end of the dominant position they have held in the post-war Swedish political history. Furthermore the extremist Sweden Democrats have forcibly entered the mainstream of Swedish politics and they have found themselves holding the balance of power in Parliament. As for the Alliance coalition, despite their inability to form a majority government, they have been offered the opportunity to return to power for a second consecutive term and to solidify their position at the centre of the Swedish political spectrum.

Gabriella Nilsson, Press Officer, European Commission Representation to Sweden

Correction: The article '[The pressure is on for economic governance Task-Force](#)' in the September issue of **The European** mentions that "*It was originally agreed that the Task-Force was going to produce its final report by mid September.*" In fact, September was never an official deadline, the Task-Force was scheduled to report in December, but it was President Van Rompuy who voluntarily decided to bring that forward to October. We apologise for the mistake.