

The Newsletter of the Local Government Group for Europe

Euronews

LGE is a non-party organisation which brings together members of the local government family who support our involvement in Europe

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A MESSAGE FROM THE GROUP'S CHAIRMAN LORD (GRAHAM) TOPE

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LGE Chairman:
Lord Tope

For the next five or six months Parliament will be dominated by the European Union (Amendment) Bill - better known as the ratification of the Lisbon or Reform Treaty. As I write, it's in its Committee Stage in the Commons. Very sensibly, in my view, the Commons have decided to allocate a "topic" for debate on each of the Committee days. At least

that forces M.P.s of all Parties to say something about that particular topic, rather than avoid any real examination of the Treaty by keeping on about whether we should have a referendum!

The Bill is due to reach the Lords in April and talks are going on now "through the usual channels" to try to adopt a similar process. I hope we do, not only because it will produce much better debates, but also because there is no guillotine in the Lords and the Government has no majority. The thought of listening, day after day, to our anti European Peers going on and on about the "Brussels conspiracy" fills me with horror!

This lengthy Parliamentary scrutiny of an important Treaty should be

welcome to us all, even though some of the views expressed may not be so welcome. It contrasts with several Member States whose Parliaments have already ratified the Treaty with only minimal scrutiny or debate. With some notable exceptions, most British M.P.s, in all Parties, are woefully ignorant about "how Europe works", let alone what is actually in the Treaty. Maybe this lengthy Parliamentary process will help enlighten them. I hope so, because when the Treaty is ratified, as I'm sure it will be, national Parliaments will have a very important role to play.

But the real benefit of this six month process will really only come if the Parliamentary debate is heard

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Why it is important to take the Treaty debate outside of Parliament

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outside Parliament. As it is, I wonder how many of our citizens will even be aware it is taking place! We shouldn't blame the media alone for that; they reflect what they believe to be of interest to their readers. The responsibility for stimulating informed public debate on the Lisbon Treaty and Britain's role in the EU, really rests with organisations like the Local Government Group for Europe.

We shouldn't sit back and feel that, because the Government is not going to hold a referendum, we don't need to bother persuading anyone of its benefits. We must use the next six months to take the debate outside Parliament too; to use any opportunity to engage with the public in language they understand and on issues that are relevant to them. That's certainly something

LGE will be trying to do, starting with our seminar on 5 March with an exceptionally knowledgeable M.P. as Guest Speaker. But it's not just for the Group to do on our collective behalf. It's an individual responsibility for each and every one of us, whatever our views, to help turn the Parliamentary debate into a public debate. Over to you! – Graham Tope

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Three great speakers lined up as the LGE debates the Treaty of Lisbon

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As Parliament grapples with HM Government's European Union (Amendment) Bill, the Local Governemnt Group for Europe is holding a Seminar in London on the Treaty of Lisbon on 5th March 2008 at the National Liberal Club SW1.

The keynote speaker will be the Rt. Hon. Denis MacShane MP, former Minister for Europe.

He will be supported by Lord Wallace of Saltaire, joint Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat peers and Professor of International Relations at LSE and the deputy German Ambassador in London, Herr Eckhard Lupkemeier.

This will be an excellent opportunity to hear three very eminent speakers

on this topical subject and to discuss and debate the issues involved.

The event commences at 12 noon with a buffet lunch, the seminar starting at 1pm.

Attendance fee - £35

LGE and European Movement members - £25

To enrol, contact Denise Slater on 01832 280659 or email her at deniseslater@waitrose.com or write to LGE, PO Box 932, Elton, Peterborough PE8 6WA

Closing date for registration – 29th February 2008

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT LGE SEMINAR ON MARCH 5

All you need to know about Denis MacShane MP

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Denis MacShane (born May 21, 1948, Glasgow), who is a vice-president of the LGE, is Labour Member of Parliament for Rotherham, and was the Minister of State for Europe at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office until the ministerial reshuffle that followed the 2005 general election. He first entered Parliament after a 1994 by-election caused by the death of Jimmy Boyce. He is the keynote speaker at the group's seminar on March 5 in London. He was born as Denis Matyjaszek, to an Irish mother and her Polish husband [1], who had fought in the Second World War and remained in exile after it. He was educated at St Benedict's School in Ealing and read history at Merton College, Oxford. After graduating from Oxford, he completed a PhD in

international economics at the University of London, he worked for the BBC from 1969 to 1977. He changed his surname to his mother's maiden name at the request of his employers. He became an activist for the National Union of Journalists and later its president. He was policy director of the International Metal Workers' Federation from 1980 to 1992, then director of the European Policy Institute from 1992 to 1994. MacShane supported the Solidarity trade union in Poland, where he was arrested in 1982 for attending a demonstration, and deported. He first contested a parliamentary seat at the October 1974 general election, where he failed to win Solihull. He was elected to the House of Commons in the 1994 Rotherham by-election, and served

as Parliamentary Private Secretary to a succession of ministers in the 1997-2001 Parliament. After the 2001 general election, he was made a junior minister at the Foreign Office with responsibility for the Balkans and Latin America.

In 2002 he became Minister of State for Europe in the reshuffle caused by the resignation of Estelle Morris. He caused some embarrassment to the government in 2002 by describing President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela as a 'ranting, populist demagogue' and compared him to Mussolini during a failed military coup attempt to depose the democratically elected president. Afterwards he had to make clear

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that, as minister with responsibility for Latin America, the government deplored the coup attempt.

On 14 March 2004, his daughter by Carol Barnes, Clare Barnes, died in Australia after her parachute failed to open on her 200th skydiving jump.

After the 2005 general election, he was dropped from the government. MacShane's failure to remain in government is believed by some to have been his falling between the two stools of being neither overtly a Blairite nor a Brownite, and thus, in his own words, having "no hand to push [him] up the greasy pole". However, his position was considered to be untenable after comments he made to a meeting of Durham Labour Students in which

he described Gordon Brown's five economic tests as, "a bit of a giant red herring." When contacted by The Scotsman newspaper about whether or not he made the comments he responded: "Jesus Christ, no. I mean, 'red herring' is not one of my favourite metaphors. If you think any Labour MP saying the Prime Minister's most important policy is a red herring, then they would not survive long in the job." However, he had been recorded on a dictaphone, with the tape played on both the Today Program and BBC News 24. MacShane himself wrote in Tribune "I have no idea why I was removed as a minister and it does not worry me in the slightest."

He was appointed a member of the Privy Council in 2005. He has

continued to write columns for The Guardian since his fall from the heights of government, as well as appearing on television programmes relating to European affairs both in Britain and in other European countries.

In 2005 he became a signatory of the Henry Jackson Society principles, advocating a proactive approach to the spread of liberal democracy across the world, including by military intervention. The society also supports "European military modernisation and integration under British leadership". In 2004 he criticised the British Muslim community, saying they didn't do enough to condemn acts of Islamic

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terrorism. He was a supporter of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and has strongly supported Tony Blair's foreign policy in relation to the Middle East and elsewhere.

He was chair of a cross-party parliamentary committee looking into Anti-Semitism in Britain which reported in September 2006. Other members included Iain Duncan-Smith and Chris Huhne.

MacShane has been called "one of the few British politicians with a deep knowledge of France."

* Footnote: Dennis MacShane has produced a brief booklet which contains an extensive list of reasons and facts why the nation should accept the Lisbon Treaty, without a referendum. The booklet goes a

long way to counter some of the traditional misconceptions about the EU and the Treaty from assorted right-wing elements.

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Lord Wallace supporting speaker at March 5 seminar



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Lord Wallace of Saltaire will join Dennis MacShane at the LGE seminar on March 5 to create a powerful platform for this important event, being held at a time when European matters in general, and that Treaty are high on the political agenda.

Lord Wallace, who will be 68 a few days after the seminar, was a chorister at Westminster Abbey Choir School and later read history at Kings College Cambridge in 1959. He joined all three political clubs at Cambridge but decided that the Liberal party was the most attractive. In 1961 he defeated Michael Steed for the Vice-Presidency and then became its President. He studied for three years at Cornell in the USA and then completed his PhD at

Oxford on the Liberal Revival 1955-66. It was during his time at Oxford that he met his wife Helen, who was President of the Liberal Club.

In the 1966 General Election he served as the Liberal party's Assistant Press Officer, responsible for Jo Grimond's press activities. He fought five parliamentary elections in Huddersfield West in 1970, Manchester Moss Side in February and October 1974, and Shipley in 1983 and 1987, and wrote speeches for David Steel for the 1979 election he co-wrote the election manifesto and then again in 1997.

He became a Peer in 1995 and was a spokesman on Foreign Affairs and Defence. In 1997 He was appointed a member of the Select Committee

on the European Communities and Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Justice and Home Affairs. Since 2001 Lord Wallace has been the Party's main frontbench spokesperson in the Lords on Foreign Affairs and in November 2004 and was elected joint Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Peers. He was Director of Studies of the Royal Institute of International Affairs 1978-1990.

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LGE President Stands Down

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Lord (Roy) Hattersley, president of the Local Government Group for Europe (LGE) has stood down from the post. As a journalist, writer and broadcaster he is in greater demand than ever and told members that he would have to give up a number of jobs and posts he held.

Roy Hattersley was a socialist and Labour supporter from his youth, electioneering for his local MP and city councillors beginning in 1945 at the age of 13. His mother, Enid Hattersley, became a city councillor and later was Lord Mayor of Sheffield (1981). He won a scholarship to Sheffield City Grammar School and went from there to study at the University of Hull. Originally having been accepted to read English at Leeds University, he was diverted

into reading Economics when told by a Sheffield colleague of his mother that it was necessary for a political career.

At university Hattersley joined the Socialist Society (SocSoc) and was one of those responsible for changing its name to the "Labour Club" and affiliating it with the non-aligned International Union of Socialist Youth rather than the Soviet-backed International Union of Students. Hattersley became chairman of the new club and later treasurer, and he went on to chair the National Association of Labour Student Organisations. He also joined the executive of the IUSY. As an MP he held a number of senior posts within the labour party and was at one time deputy to Neil (now

Lord) Kinnock.

Members of the LGE have thanked Lord Hattersley for his support for them in European matters, as well as for his pro-European stance since the 1970s.

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Thoughts about the European Reform Treaty

by Paul Bongers de Rath

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As this issue of Euronews goes to press, Parliament is embarking on its detailed examination of the Reform Treaty agreed in principle in Lisbon last June. Most comment so far has focused on the Government's decision not to put the Treaty to a referendum on the grounds that it is not a 'constitutional text' in the way that the previous Treaty, voted down in France and the Netherlands, had been.

In truth, many of the provisions remain from the previous version, but they have been re-cast as amendments to the EU Treaties already in force, making the text less 'constitutional' (if also rather harder to fathom). Some of the more contested provisions - such as the designation of an EU 'foreign

minister' and formal status for the existing European flag and anthem - have been dropped, and more opt-outs have been agreed for the UK such as on justice and home affairs. But – fortunately - the main purposes of the Treaty, to make the enlarged EU operate more efficiently, to increase its accountability, and to strengthen parliamentary scrutiny, remain largely intact.

Given that there are so many positive points about the new Treaty, it is disturbing that most media reports about it completely ignore these. In brief (with acknowledgements to the European Movement's Senior Experts Group briefing on the subject):

It will clarify and limit the EU's powers:

- the Treaty states as a principle that the EU has only those powers conferred on it by the Member States;
- the Treaty defines the categories of competence of the EU and enables competences to be transferred back to Member States.

It will streamline the EU:

- the number of Commissioners will be reduced in 2014 to two-thirds of the number of Member States;
- the rotating six-month presidency of the European Council will be replaced by a President elected by the Member States for a 2½ year term;

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- the size of the European Parliament will be capped at 751 members and its role in decision-making will be strengthened.

It will make the EU more accountable to national parliaments and to Member State governments:

- national parliaments will be able to challenge legislative proposals on grounds of subsidiarity;
- there will be additional powers for national parliaments to scrutinise EU activity.

It will improve the ability of the EU to make Europe more competitive:

- through modest moves to majority voting: the areas covered such as energy, intellectual property, transport and the European research area, are ones where any votes are

likely to help Britain to get its way in the Council;

- through reducing the national veto: this makes it less likely that Member States can block legislation that opens up markets, whilst unanimity is retained for tax and social security matters.

It will make the EU a more powerful voice in the world:

- merging the currently separate roles of External Relations Commissioner and High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy will give the EU a more consistent voice in world affairs under the direction of Member States in the Council.

It respects the rights and privileges of Member States, including the UK:

- by establishing a procedure whereby a country can withdraw from the EU;

- by making it clear that the EU will only act if objectives being pursued cannot be achieved by Member States, or regional or local government, alone;

- by stating that the EU respects Member States' constitutional and other traditions and reserving national security to Member States.

LGE members should do all they can to help make these advantages of the Reform Treaty better understood. So far from clearing the way towards the dreaded 'European super-state', the Treaty provides the means whereby the citizens of Europe,

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with and through their democratic institutions, will gain new rights and new means of influence over crucial decisions affecting all our futures.

and Honorary Secretary of the LGE.

This advance must not be lost in the morass of petty recriminations about the calling (or not) of a referendum. A Coalition for the Reform Treaty has recently been set up, bringing together a dozen pro-European organisations. Its recent 'Guide to the Lisbon Treaty', available through the European Movement website www.euromove.org.uk, is well worth reading. I hope the LGE will soon be numbered among the active members of the Coalition.

*Paul Bongers de Rath, a committed pro-European for many years, is a former Director of the Local Government International Bureau

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The Onward March of the Euro

by Hon Treasurer Colin Jeynes

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When the Euro was launched, it engendered a frenzy of media hysteria in Britain. This was yet another laughable European scam designed to take control of the life of our nation. It would of course fail and it would show yet again how Brussels bureaucrats were self-serving and intent on making the English subservient to the ghastly machine run by the Germans who were trying to subsume the glorious City of London beneath their Teutonic umbrella.

This welter of opprobrium was, remember, not an argument against Britain being a part of the new monetary system – at the time there was no immediate question of that. This was invective surrounding the mere idea that there was room in a

world dominated by The Pound for a currency run by and for “Johnny foreigners”! [As a matter of reality the monetary world was at the time dominated by The Dollar (which also was run by and for equally foreign people, who did however speak an approximation of English and were therefore perhaps a little more acceptable!).]

But why do I recall at this time these absurd manifestations almost a decade ago of the British media hatred of all things European?

It is instructive to look now at the Euro and its progress in the world of money. At the end of 2007 it was in use in thirteen countries and is possibly the strongest currency in the modern money market. British

holiday-makers are finding that all over the world (except the Americas themselves) the Euro is certainly more usable than the dollar and in many places is more attractive for exchange even than our dearly beloved pound. Those undertaking touring holidays on land or sea in and around Europe (and its bordering states) relish the convenience of a single currency to ease their spending sprees; their sideboards at home then creak with the weight of Euro notes and coins being kept aside for their next adventure.

Most of them indeed would not argue at all if Britain added itself to that convenient lifestyle by

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adopting the Euro. But that is a different issue and needs a mature assessment of the economic benefits and disadvantages of such a change. It is not an argument which I am equipped to start.

All I would say is that the Euro is creeping up on us and making our isolation from it less and less easy to rationalise. And now, with its latest advance, it has actually come into use on British sovereign territory. From 1 January 2008, both Malta and Cyprus have given up their currencies and gone to the Euro as their legal tender. This brings the number of countries in that position to fifteen. But how does that affect us, you may ask?

It has been agreed that the Euro

has become the legal tender in use at Britain's military bases in Cyprus; these bases are Sovereign British Territory and have therefore become the first "part of Britain" in which the Euro is the legal local currency, and the pound is not! So watch out, folks, the Euro is coming up fast on the outside and will be sneaking into Britain in the pockets of our troops. What the Daily Mail will make of this gives me cause for some excitement – somehow they seem to have missed it so far – and I look forward to reading whose fault they deem it to be that this has been allowed to happen.

No, that's not true really! I already know who they will blame (Brussels and Gordon Brown) and in any case I wouldn't dream of reading the Daily

Mail anyway.



Two Great Luminaries of Local Government

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Local government has lost two of its best-known luminaries, with the recent deaths (within days of each other) of a senior politician and a respected journalist.

Geoffrey Smith advanced from being Editor of the Local Government Chronicle to company chairman and during this time Geoffrey set himself out on a mission to visit personally many local authorities throughout the UK. He virtually paid a call on the lot!

There were many tributes paid to Geoffrey at Colchester at an event to celebrate his life (1931-2007) and there were, of course, many references to his knowledge about wines – and French wines in particular. He was, as he once said, a great fan of Europe and served

on the Executive Committee of the LGE. He is survived by his wife Betty and donations in Geoffrey's memory should be sent to the Motor Neurone Disease Association.

Roy Shaw was one of the most respected councillors in London, the UK and across Europe in general. After becoming an elected member in Hampstead in 1956 and St Pancras Council in 1962, he went on to join the newly formed, in 1964/65, London Borough of Camden.

During the time he was council leader, Camden was described by a senior civil servant as the flagship of progressive local government in the UK. There was no doubt that had Roy gone into national politics, he would surely have become a Cabinet Minister. His local government cv

runs to several pages. His political intellect was immediately apparent and he commanded the respect of his officers and advisors.

In recognition of his extraordinary contribution to Camden and its people, Roy was made the council's only Honorary Alderman in July 2007. Golders Green Crematorium in north London was overflowing, and, in between highlights of the works of some of Roy's favourite composers, among them Mahler and Mussorgsky, there were warm and glowing tributes, including one from Tessa Jowell, MP, a former member of Camden. Roy Edwin Shaw, OBE, was born on 21 July, 1925 and died on 4 January 2008. – Edward Bevin

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February 2008

Richard Corbett, UK Labour MEP for Yorkshire and Humberside, and a great supporter of the role of local government within the EU, wrote an authoritative piece on his Blog after the opening debate in the House of Commons on the Reform Treaty:

The Debate Begins!

The Treaty Is All About Reform – Not New Powers

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The first hurdle to the parliamentary ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was easily cleared in the House of Commons last night. Despite extravagant claims in some newspapers that up to 100 Labour MPs would defy the government by voting against the treaty, the bill's second reading was passed by 362 to 224, with 19 rebel Labour MPs, (a small group with a history of being Eurosceptic), voting with the Conservatives.

Let us be clear - leaving aside the hyperbole, the Lisbon Treaty amounts to a set of modest adjustments to the EU's institutional framework such as replacing the rotating six-month presidency with a full-time one on a 30 month term, reducing the number of Commissioners to

18, altering the voting system in the Council to be based on population and increasing the role of elected parliaments in EU law-making. But in terms of what the EU can and cannot do, it changes little. Unlike the Single European Act or Maastricht, there are no new subjects added to the EU's field of responsibility - put bluntly; the Lisbon Treaty is about reform, not new powers.

The Tories' opposition to this treaty is nakedly opportunistic and lacks credibility. As David Miliband put it: "Left of centre parties in all 27 European countries support the treaty; liberal parties in all 27 countries support the treaty; and Conservative parties in 26 countries support the treaty. Only in Britain do we have a major party opposed to

the contents of the treaty."

Indeed, William Hague's speech for the Conservatives was long on jokes (no one can accuse Mr Hague of lacking a rhetorical flourish) but fell short on substance. At one point, he defended his party's opposition of the treaty on the grounds that it would "weaken democracy" by taking "more decision making away from democratic control". This argument simply does not stand up. In fact, the Lisbon Treaty, by making virtually all EU legislation subject to the prior scrutiny of national parliaments (with the power to object to a proposal) and to approval by both the Council of Ministers (representing national governments) and directly elected

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MEPs in the European Parliament. This would amount to a level of parliamentary scrutiny and democratic accountability that exists in no other international structure. To claim that this is a diminution of parliamentary democracy is no more than intellectual laziness.

My analogy that, just as the Lisbon Treaty is estimated to be 90% the same as the Constitutional Treaty, human beings and mice are 90% the same in terms of their DNA but the difference is pretty important, also made an appearance in Hansard, being quoted approvingly (and with acknowledgment) by the new Lib Dem Foreign Affairs spokesman Ed Davey, who also made a fine speech. It was also cheering to hear Nick Clegg's interview on Radio 4 this morning,

during which he appeared to state that the Liberal Democrats would not support any Tory attempts to defeat the Government in demanding a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. Although the Lib Dems have a reputation for saying different things to please different people, voting in favour of a treaty that they support rather than voting against it in a bid to embarrass and score points against the Government, would be an honourable approach.

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José Manuel Barroso Calls for New Commitment with the Regions to Tackle Forthcoming Major Projects

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At a lunch with representatives of the Committee of the Regions and seven associations of local and regional authorities (CPMR, AER, CALRE, AEBR, REGLEG, CEMR, EUROCITIES), José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, affirmed his commitment to close cooperation between his institution and the regions in implementing the Lisbon Treaty and in the European Union's efforts to address the current challenges facing our world.

In the light of the statement by Michel Delebarre, president of the Committee of the Regions, that: "It is our duty to popularise the Lisbon Treaty and to persuade the media to play a greater educational

role" and comments by Mr Barroso during the lunch about "the need for communication where everyone plays a part within their own remit, a concern which does not lower European ambitions but raises the level of expectations with regard to Europe", it is only natural that the president of the European Commission should conclude by speaking about the need for a new commitment to communicate Europe in partnership.

The willingness to cooperate was expressed by all sides during a discussion on the Commission's work programme for 2008. Mr Barroso welcomed the signature of the Lisbon Treaty, saying that it marked the "ushering in of a kind of

spring for Europe for it lays down a clear legal basis for involvement by local and regional authorities in the legislative process". For the Committee of the Regions and all the other associations present, the Treaty also has the merit that it recognises the goal of territorial cohesion as a new objective for the EU, which is important at a time when the 2009 budget revision is being considered. In this context, several participants called for greater consistency between this new objective and competition policy, the CAP, taxation and social policy.

Buoyed by this positive atmosphere, the president of the Commission,

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the commissioner responsible for cohesion policy, Danuta Hübner, and the representatives of local and regional authorities raised the question of climate change, as in January the Commission is due to announce a wide-ranging action plan for combating and adapting to climate change, with a view to the next Spring Council. Mr Delebarre highlighted two key areas for action – housing and transport – “where local and regional authorities can make a major contribution, in terms of investment and incentives, towards changing the behaviour of our fellow citizens”.

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CoR Invites New Partners to Join Subsidiarity Monitoring Network

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The Committee of the Regions is calling on local and regional authorities to join forces with the 49 partners that have already signed up to its subsidiarity monitoring network. The network informs local government about upcoming European Commission initiatives and enables them to provide early feedback. Current partners include the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Local Government Association, the French Senate, the Catalan Parliament and Bavarian State government. The network will also fuel the CoR's political work and enable it to highlight the need for Europe to 'think subsidiarity' before proposals are tabled.

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Twinning Towns and Cities across Europe

by Jonathon Brown

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You might say that the instinct to twin towns and cities is intricately entwined with the idea of war... The earliest examples are, after all, the treaties between city-states designed to protect each other's interests in times of hostilities. The Romans were particularly effective at such politics and the tradition continued into the Renaissance, with alliances between Milan and Verona against Florence and Naples to oppose the Emperor Henry VII. And as we take the train from Pisa to Florence we cross between two eternally rival states, once in war, now in football.

Now, yes, it is the other way round: the great expansion of twinning arrangements has its most recent origins in the hope never to repeat the destructiveness of the second

World War. Perhaps an impetus was supplied by the unprecedented involvement of the citizenry in warfare, under the bombings of major cities, but whatever the case it was soon after 1945 that the first twinings took place. Indeed, Vancouver had already in 1944 established such a relationship of solidarity with Odessa, but it was in peacetime that such links could really flourish and in Europe that the greatest enthusiasm was first expressed for such links. In 1947 Bristol, for instance, send 'leading citizens' to Hanover and Edinburgh signed a twinning agreement with Nice. Understandably with less urgency than in war-torn Europe, it was President Eisenhower who instituted the so-called Sister City programme in the United States of

America in the mid-1950s, a scheme which ten years later became fully international.

Edinburgh has an interesting history in this context. At the time of the Enlightenment, in the middle to late eighteenth century, Edinburgh became known as 'The Athens of the North', for its vision, architecture and intellectual life - while Prague was known as the Edinburgh of the East! These were in no way formal arrangements, but they do signal that a sense of community across wide distances is not a recent phenomenon. And at the same time as that first twinning with Nice, Edinburgh was to establish its annual arts festival to provide

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an international meeting point for creative spirits from across Europe and the world. On the other hand, some years ago, at a time when the political administrations of Edinburgh and Nice were at the opposite extremes of the spectrum, the twinning tended to lie dormant. The choice of twin may be based on all sorts of factors, geographical or industrial for instance, growing from long-standing traditions rooted in the past or recent haphazard encounters of like artistic spirits; other links have also been prompted by political sentiments of solidarity, such as with Poland in the 1970s, and more recently with China and Cuba. Some pairings are a perfect and neat fit: for instance, Monza (Italy), with its great cambered racing track is twinned with... why, Indianapolis, of

course! The old university town of Leiden in The Netherlands is twinned with Oxford while Cambridge is twinned with Heidelberg; Porto, in Portugal, where the port comes from, is twinned with Bristol, in England, where the port goes... As for Beaune, lost in vineyards, linked with Hitchen in the heartland of London's commuter belt - I leave historians to investigate that!

Recent EU expansion brings new challenges: cities from different countries within Western Europe have thus for long established closer cooperation, but now it is for cities and towns once part of countries lying across the Iron Curtain to reach out. An imaginative example comes with Vienna (Austria) and Bratislava (Slovakia) - now unofficially

called "Twin City Vienna-Bratislava". These great centres were once a mere tram-ride away. Their new re-integration is taking shape and with a population of almost 5 million (9 million if you include surrounding regions within 2 hours by car or train), this new urban area may be one of the largest in Central Europe. Vienna has a thriving high-tech biotechnology industry while Bratislava has attracted many car manufacturers. Moreover, the location of this new "Twin City" is ideal for developing European as well as Euroasian projects. Two international airports that once served mainly domestic customers are increasingly evolving to be regional hubs serving tens of millions

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from all over Central and Southeast Europe and given its good location on some of European busiest rivers, the new Twin has the best of opportunities to become, once again, as it was 100 years ago, a focus of Central European economic life. The links do not have to be that dramatic, however; nor the towns so grand. An exchange of some youngsters between schools may have less fanfare than swapping blockbuster arts exhibitions, but it will sow just as rich a seed in the imaginations of the children. A fishing port on the coast of Scotland may be twinned with a small village in the Italian Lakes, but the exchange is as inspirational and welcome as any. Not surprisingly, the European Union takes care to do its part to administer, encourage, finance and

propagate these important ties. The year 1989 saw the establishment of a support scheme and by 2003 well over 10 million Euros were allocated to about 1,300 projects.

In 2003 ten outstanding initiatives involving 27 towns received Golden Stars awards at an award ceremony in the Charlemagne building of the European Commission. "Town twinning is an excellent example of what citizens can do at a local level to contribute to the greater integration of Europe. It is by sharing our different experiences that we grow richer both culturally and socially," said Ján Figel', European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism, a perfect summation of exactly the ambitions that inspired the very first

formal arrangements sixty years ago. All town-twinning projects are now managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive

Agency and you can make direct contact with the Agency at :
EACE Agency, Unit P7 Citizenship
BOUR 135-139
1049 BRUSSELS
fax : ++ 32 (0)2.296.23.89
telephone: ++ 32 (0)2. 299.11.11.

The web page for the European Union's twinning programmes is at:
http://ec.europa.eu/towntwinning/index_en.html

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New Allocation of Seats in the European Parliament Debated

MEPs have adopted a report on the new allocation of seats in the European Parliament after the next legislative elections, in 2009. MEPs call for a revision of the proposed distribution of seats for the 2014-2019 parliamentary term. The report was adopted with 378 votes in favour, 154 against and 109 abstentions. The European Council will base its final decision on this decision of the European Parliament. However, the changes are dependent on the adoption of the EU Reform Treaty, failing which the Nice Treaty applies (see Nice column in the table below).

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Member State	Population (1) (in millions)	% of EU-27 population	Seats until 2009	“Nice” (2) 2009-2014	Report as adopted in plenary 2009-2014 (3)	Adopted report (4)
Germany	82,438	16,73%	99	99	96	-3
France	62,886	12,76%	78	72	74	2
UK	60,422	12,26%	78	72	73	1
Italy	58,752	11,92%	78	72	72	
Spain	43,758	8,88%	54	50	54	4
Poland	38,157	7,74%	54	50	51	1
Romania	21,61	4,38%	35	33	33	
Netherlands	16,334	3,31%	27	25	26	1
Greece	11,125	2,26%	24	22	22	
Portugal	10,57	2,14%	24	22	22	
Belgium	10,511	2,13%	24	22	22	
Czech Rep.	10,251	2,08%	24	22	22	
Hungary	10,077	2,04%	24	22	22	
Sweden	9,048	1,84%	19	18	20	2
Austria	8,266	1,68%	18	17	19	2
Bulgaria	7,719	1,57%	18	17	18	1
Denmark	5,428	1,10%	14	13	13	
Slovakia	5,389	1,09%	14	13	13	
Finland	5,256	1,07%	14	13	13	
Ireland	4,209	0,85%	13	12	12	
Lithuania	3,403	0,69%	13	12	12	
Latvia	2,295	0,47%	9	8	9	1
Slovenia	2,003	0,41%	7	7	8	1
Estonia	1,344	0,27%	6	6	6	
Cyprus	0,766	0,16%	6	6	6	
Luxembourg	0,46	0,09%	6	6	6	
Malta	0,404	0,08%	5	5	6	1
EU-27	492,881	100,00%	785	736	750	

The following allocation of seats in the European Parliament for the 2009-2014 parliamentary term was approved:

(1) Population figures as officially established on 7 Nov. 2006 by the Commission in Doc. 15124/06 on the basis of Eurostat figures.

(2) “Nice”: Distribution of Seats according to Art. 189 TEC as modified by Art. 9 of the BG/RO - Act of Accession.

(3) “New”: New Proposal on the basis of Art. 9A TEU new (I-20).

(4) The new figures concerning Germany and Malta derive automatically from the draft reform treaty provisions.



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Local Councils' Status and Role Recognised by UK Government

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London, 13 December 2007: The UK Government and the country's Local Government Association (LGA) have signed an historic constitutional concordat to recognise for the first time local councils' status and role in law. The document was promised in Gordon Brown's first White Paper as Prime Minister, The Governance of Britain, and was drafted by officials from both tiers of government and signed by the Communities Secretary Hazel Blears and the Chair of the LGA Simon Milton.

The document, signed at a special meeting of the LGA's biannual assembly in London, states that:

- the government recognises the electoral mandate of every councillor in the country
- commits the government to being

transparent in its funding of local services and agrees to work towards giving councils greater flexibility in the way councils are funded

- commits it to the principle of subsidiarity
- commits it to work towards the autonomy principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government

LGA Chair and leader of Westminster city council Simon Milton said: "Delivering on the Concordat will be a significant challenge for both councils and government. We have long argued that centralism sells people short. With this agreement we can demonstrate that the best, fastest and most efficient way forward for all of us is for people and their councils to take ownership of

local services and work together to improve them. If both sides can deliver on their commitments in this Concordat, then this will ultimately benefit the people we all serve."

The concordat is currently an in principle agreement and can be revised at any time. However, under the Draft Constitutional Renewal Bill currently being considered by Parliament, it will form part of the Brown administration's attempts at moving Britain towards a written constitution.

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Report to Reform British Local Government ‘Strangled at Birth’

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London, 11 December 2007: The final report of a commission appointed by the British government to examine ways to attract more diverse candidates for local councils has been accused of being “strangled at birth”. The Councillors Commission was set up under the government of Tony Blair to suggest ways in which a more representative selection of the electorate could be encouraged to seek election to English local governments. However, its radical proposals were quickly pounced upon by the opposition Conservative Party as being “all about more cash being stuffed in the pockets of Labour, jobs for the boys and back-door state funding”, leaving government sources to dismiss many of its suggestions out of hand even before the formal publication of the

report.

The commission was established in February 2007 as a result of a key proposal of the government’s October 2006 Local Government White Paper, to be chaired by the former leader of Camden Council in London, Dr Jane Roberts. The main thrust of the report recommends lowering the voting age to 16 and holding all local elections on one day every four years but staggered by region to ensure proper scrutiny and more awareness. The more contentious proposals put forward include redundancy packages for mayors and council leaders who lose their seats in an election, three term limits for mayors and leaders and five term limits for local councillors, allowing councillors to claim civic

allowances and welfare benefits simultaneously and lifting political restrictions on local authority employees to encourage them to stand for election or get involved in local election activity.

The report also suggest abolishing by-elections. Its authors argue that at the time of local elections, political parties should be able to publish a list of reserve councillors, who could replace a councillor of their party who stood down during their term, thus avoiding the need for a by-election.

Conservative local government spokesman Eric Pickles MP said that “it is vital that councillors are

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fundamentally arms-length volunteers - and do not become the bankrolled staff of the town hall dependant on the municipal pay packet.” On the question of redundancy packages and financial incentives, a government source claimed: “We will not be taking this forward. We believe we can give better support and get better local representation from councillors without imposing a major new financial burden on local taxpayers.” The Liberal Democrats however, welcomed the commission’s proposal to allow councils to experiment with more proportional election systems, while one observer pointed to the government’s early response as “strangling the proposals at birth”.

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Congress Moves to Malaga for March Session

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The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe will be holding its spring session in Malaga (Spain) from 13 to 14 March 2008. The main items on its agenda will include sustainable development, the situation of local and regional democracy in Spain and Turkey, inter-regional co-operation in the Black Sea basin, and the draft Urban Charter.

On 13 March (afternoon), the Congress will be debating “The consumer’s civic responsibility for sustainable development”, and then “Climate change: building the adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities” in plenary session. Halvdan Skard, President of the Congress, and Francisco de la Torre Prados, Mayor of Malaga,

will address the session before the debates.

The Chamber of Regions and the Chamber of Local Authorities will meet in parallel on the same day. The latter’s agenda will include debates on city diplomacy, integration through sport and biodiversity policies for urban areas. Carlos Alberto Pinto (Portugal , EPP/CD) will also be presenting his report on the European Urban Charter. The Chamber of Regions will discuss policies for territorial cohesion, and inter-regional co-operation in the Black Sea basin.

During the session, the Pro Merito Medal of the Congress will be presented to Risto Koivisto (Finland), former President of the Chamber of

Regions.

*Footnote: The late Group Captain Gordon Pirie, who as a Westminster councillor was deeply involved in European matters, also received the Pro Merito Medal in the 1980s. The death of Lady Pirie was announced at the end of January.

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New Post for LGE Vice-President

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Ian Taylor MP, a vice-president of the Local Government Group for Europe (LGE) is the newly-appointed chairman of the Conservative Group for Europe (CGE), the organisation has announced.

Ian Taylor was one of the original founders of the CGE over thirty years ago. The group says it is looking forward to a dynamic future under his direction.

Ian Taylor is MP for Esher and Walton, entering Parliament in 1987.

He was Minister for Science and Technology at the Department of Trade and Industry (1994-97). He now chairs the Conservative Party's Policy Task-force on Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics.

He is Vice-Chairman of the all-party European Movement Group; Chairman of the Conservative Group for Europe; and a former Chairman of the European Movement.

Ian is an officer of several all-party Parliamentary committees relating to communications and technology as well as co-Chairman of the Parliamentary Space Committee. He is a member of the IPPR Commission on National Security.

Prior to entering Parliament, Ian had 18 years experience of providing corporate finance and management advice to companies in the UK, France and USA. He now is a non-

executive director of or adviser to several companies.

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Jim Murphy ,MP, Minister for Europe

Some New Resolutions for the European Union

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'Kicking off 2008 with good intentions, the EU, like many of us, is aiming to trim back some unwanted surplus. The Lisbon Treaty will help to do just that - streamlining institutions and processes to make the EU more effective, more fit for purpose.

But as well as resolving to tidy up its own affairs, the EU should determine to make the most of the opportunity it now has to play a truly global role. As outlined in my speech to the London School of Economics some of the ways in which I believe the EU can act as a force for global progress.

2008 should mark a new chapter for the European Union. I have met representatives from leading British businesses and we have discussed three key challenges for governments

and businesses in Europe:
Renewed commitment to high levels of growth and employment
Commitment to free trade and openness

Tackling climate change and energy security
The message I took away was that many business leaders share our view of the EU as an opportunity for, not a threat to, the UK, and they too want to see more progress on the liberalisation of the energy, post and telecomms markets and better regulation. Over three million British jobs – tens of thousands of jobs in every region of the UK – are directly linked to our membership of the EU. You can see in this study by the Southbank University how many jobs are dependent on exports to the EU in your region. There's no

doubt that British jobs and Britain's continued prosperity depend on our relationship with the EU.'

Mr Murphy was appointed Minister for Europe on 29 June 2007. His new portfolio as Minister for Europe includes responsibility for the UK's relations with each European nation as well as the European Union, Russia, Central Asia, South Caucasus, Balkans, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the UK's relationship with NATO.

The minister says he wants to encourage a more informed debate about Europe and the Reform Treaty.

In the meantime, Mr Murphy has stressed that the reform treaty

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Jim Murphy ,MP, Minister for Europe

Some New Resolutions for the European Union

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would lead to no transfer of power away from Britain on issues of importance to the country's sovereignty. Writing in a national newspaper correspondence column, he declared: "Let us have a debate about the treaty on the basis of fact, not fiction." He went on: "It is wrong to claim that, 'under the new treaty, 55 vetoes are scrapped outright.' There are 50 extensions of majority voting, but, of these, 16 will either not apply in Britain, or only if we agree to them. A further 14 are procedural to improve EU efficiency. And the other 20 significant extensions are manifestly in Britain's national interest."

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Why the EU is Good For Us All

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Here is copy of a letter which LGE Vice-chairman wrote to his local evening newspaper, aimed at silencing the eurosceptics.

FROM: DAVID CANDLER, 6 Foley Road, St John's, Worcester WR2 4LW. Tel. 426373.

SIR –

Shortly after David Cameron became Tory leader he famously described UKIP supporters as “fruitcakes and loonies” and he also appealed to Conservatives to “stop banging on about Europe”.

His plea seems to have fallen on deaf ears in and around Worcester, judging by the regular flow of anti-European Union letters appearing in

your columns.

So, just for a change, let's take a look at some of the reasons why the European Union is good for us all:

- Democracy now flourishing in 27 countries;
- Once-poor countries, such as Ireland, Greece and Portugal, now prospering;
- Four weeks statutory paid holiday a year for workers in Europe;
- Food labelling made much clearer;
- Regional development fund has aided deprived parts of Britain (and notably helped to regenerate West Midlands conurbation);
- Increased competition in telecommunications industry leading to cheaper 'phone calls;
- Co-operation on fighting crime,

through Europol;

- Cleaner beaches and rivers throughout Europe;
- Helping to save the planet with regulatory cuts in CO₂;
- Strict safety standards for cars, buses and aircraft;
- Free medical help for tourists;
- Compensation for passengers suffering air delays;
- Strict ban on animal testing for the cosmetic industry;
- Giving twice as much aid to 'third world' countries as the United States does;
- Greater protection for Europe's wildlife.

Nobody suggests the European Union is perfect, anymore than

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successive British governments, Worcester City Council or, indeed, any organisation in which human beings are involved. But the truth is that most of the positive legislative initiatives in the social field over the last 30 years have stemmed from EU legislation – and this is what the eurosceptics cannot or will not come to terms with. And – lo and behold – 35 years after joining Europe we're still drinking pints and eating bent bananas!

DAVID CANDLER
Labour city councillor.

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“Fog in Westminster, Europe Cut Off”

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This Federal Trust pamphlet by the former European Commissioner and Director General of the World Trade Organisation, Peter Sutherland of Ireland, warns that the United Kingdom is now “nearer to systematic ‘semi-detachment’ from the European Union than it has ever been since 1973”. In a review of British policy towards the EU over the past fifteen years, he argues that the “continuity of European policy between new Labour and its predecessor in government has been remarkable”. Neither party, in Peter Sutherland’s view, has had the “courage to explain to the British electorate that political integration within the European Union is central to the way the Union works, that the European institutions are a necessary part of this integration ... and that

political integration is beneficial to those who participate in it”.

On the Euro, on institutional questions, on Britain’s place in the world, Peter Sutherland accuses successive British governments of failing to give a “positive and realistic” account of the EU and the way it works. These governments have in effect accepted the radical Eurosceptic analysis, whereby continuing European political integration is “equated with the ill-defined nightmare of a European super-state”. The negative rhetoric of “opt-outs achieved, red lines secured, and national interests defended against the supposed threat posed to them by the EU” has been the inevitable result.

Peter Sutherland believes, however, that more British voters than is sometimes realised by their political leaders recognise the need for “European solutions to pressing contemporary problems such as global warming, international terrorism, trade negotiations, energy security, and the application of new technologies”. A British politician who spoke to this audience might be “surprised at the ease with which the construction of a new, less complex-ridden British approach to the EU could advance”. Anti-European feeling in the United Kingdom is “frequently superficial, based on a lack of interest and information rather than genuine hostility”.

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The pamphlet “Fog in Westminster, Europe Cut Off” was published in January by the Federal Trust, of which Peter Sutherland is President. It can be downloaded from the Federal Trust website: www.fedtrust.co.uk/admin/uploads/Essay41_Sutherland.pdf. For further information, or to order a hard copy of the pamphlet for £5, contact the Director of the Federal Trust, Brendan Donnelly: director@fedtrust.co.uk or tel. 0207 320 3045.

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European Movement Back on Track

Paul Bongers de Rath reports

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After a hard period of financial crisis and serious retrenchment, the European Movement is re-emerging as a strong membership-based organisation committed to putting the pro-European case among politicians and the wider public. With Charles Kennedy MP, former Lib-Dem Leader, as President and Peter Luff, former Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society, as Chairman, the Movement has an effective leadership team, working with a newly elected National Council and Executive. The excellent website has been re-launched (www.euromove.org.uk), a series of policy pamphlets and expert briefings are being issued, and Branches throughout the country have been organising 'Speak Up Europe' public sounding-board meetings and

recruiting new members.

As Peter Luff said in his new year message to members: "The European Movement is beginning 2008 in better shape than we have been for many years. This is very good news because we are faced with arguably the biggest challenge we have faced since the referendum campaign a generation ago - to convince our fellow citizens that Europe is not merely important for our economic prosperity but, even more crucially, central to our security in the coming decades.

"As the world staggers from one crisis to another, the peaceful evolution of 27 countries into a strong and powerful Union prepared and able to work together, with

increasing democratic accountability, on such key issues as trade, environmental protection including climate change, justice and home affairs, is little short of miraculous and offers hope to other areas of the world presently engaged in seemingly endless conflict.

"One of the many reasons we are extremely fortunate in having Charles Kennedy as our new President is that he not only makes the case for Europe in the corridors of Westminster and Whitehall but that he also takes it out to people throughout the country with great wit and good humour. Already, we are experiencing a far higher level of coverage in the media and we

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shall ensure that this expands greatly during the coming year.

“I hope that, in 12 months time, a strong and united European Movement will be playing a major part in the debate on Britain’s future and that we shall begin to see a real change in the British people’s perception of the European Union. I hope also that you can help us bring this about.”

LGE collaborates closely with the European Movement at national level, and urges its members to be active in local EM Branches. Partnerships like this are vital to help make the European Movement, in Peter Luff’s words, “the strong and vibrant campaigning organisation it must become”.

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The Benefits of Membership

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The current debate in Parliament on the Treaty of Lisbon brings home to one how impossible it is in Britain to have a real debate on Europe and our membership/role in it. The media coverage is uniformly opposed to all things European and seeks, along with (most of) the Conservative Party, to try to secure some vote from the British public, not on the Treaty but on our membership of the European Community itself.

The absence of any place where genuine debate can occur makes it ever more important that organisations such as the Local Government Group for Europe maintain their ability to provide a home for all those, of whatever political outlook, who do seek such a debate. For without such a debate

there is no prospect of Britain securing from its EC membership all the benefits for which there is potential. It is little understood in Britain (because of the attitude of our media) that only in Britain, of all the 26 member countries, is there ever raised a question of membership itself; there may be arguments about aspects of European policy (the CAP, the Euro, immigration) but only here are such issues extrapolated into doubts about membership.

The issue of Europe is made “political” by its presentation in our media. Only the Liberal Democrats appear to be united in their support for Europe. The two other political parties have sections which provide a place where pro-Europeans can

gather together, rather than an overt position for the whole party. This was amply displayed in the first vote on the Treaty in Parliament when it gave an opportunity for the pro-Europe Tories to creep out of their bunker and join the vast majority of the House in supporting the Treaty itself. It was amusing to watch how the media, in the run-up to that vote, sought to persuade us that the Government was at grave risk of being defeated; then, when that of course transpired not to be true, blamed the Government’s escape on just 5 Tory MPs led by Kenneth Clarke.

LGE tries to provide a channel of communication among all those in

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the local government family who support our membership in Europe, whatever their political view. To help in this it has invested in its circulation of Euronews and will in the summer be making that distribution even wider so that it reaches almost every local government councillor in the UK. Information and views are welcome to make sure that Euronews has a relevance to everyone to whom we send it.

But LGE also runs seminars during the year which allow members (and their guests) to hear significant speakers with international standing and very often speakers from outside the UK who can move us beyond the “little Englander” atmosphere of British media polemics. These seminars provide an additional

benefit of membership which goes beyond the mere opportunity to read Euronews and also puts you alongside others who see the world as you do. And this is the real benefit of membership.

The discount for membership access to seminars (always at least £10 per event and there are usually at least 2 in a year) means that membership of LGE becomes effectively a mere £5 per annum – the annual membership rate is a minimum of £25 (you can pay more if you want to!).

So if you want to evidence your commitment to Europe in a non-political arena and would welcome the chance to add attendance at our seminars to your reading of Euronews, then drop me an email

(colin@thejeynesfamily.com) and I will set the wheels in motion for you. Nothing could be easier!

Colin Jeynes
Honorary Treasurer.

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What LGE is all about?

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How to Join

LGE provides a forum for pro-European local government members and officers to develop a pragmatic course within the national context. We have members from all political parties and others with no political affiliation.

There has never been a more important time for people who share our vision for Europe to join us. The vision of an expanding and united Europe has clearly been one of the casualties of the French and Dutch referendums. The Constitutional Treaty, inevitably, will need to go back to the drawing board, though it is worth emphasising that it envisaged giving local government a bigger say in the decision-making process.

The LGE is democratic direct membership association for individual

pro-Europeans. It is affiliated to the European Movement, Britain's main pro-Europe network. Among the benefits are:

- a regular newsletter
- seminars and events on European themes
- active presence at the LGA annual conference and other major gatherings
- participation in general meetings and elections to the LGE's executive.

President

Rt Hon. (Lord) Roy Hattersley

Vice Presidents

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne MEP

Denis MacShane MP

Ian Taylor MP

Robert Walter MP

Robert Corbett MEP

Robert Neame CBE DL

Chair

(Lord) Graham Tope

Leader, Liberal-Democrat Group, Greater London Assembly; member, European Committee of the Regions and Council of Europe

Vice-chairs

Cllr Josephine Barrett

Conservative member, London Borough of Hillingdon

Cllr David Candler

Labour Member, Worcester City Council

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