

Why David Cameron Should Be Dating Angela Merkel

Jonathan Fryer, Exec member blogs:

According to Forbes Magazine, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel has risen significantly up the charts of the most powerful women in the world. Actually, one doesn't really need an American publication to tell us that: here in Europe it is bleeding obvious. At least, one would have thought so. But apparently that is not the case for the UK Conservative leader, David Cameron, who recently cold-shouldered Frau Merkel and her Christian Democrat party by getting into bed with some pretty distasteful Eastern European fringe politicians in the European Parliament.

He may well live to regret this move, as like Mrs Thatcher when she was in office, Angela Merkel keeps a close eye on who is one of us and who is not. Moreover, despite being dismissed as a frowsty East German technocrat when she first entered post-reunification German politics, Frau Merkel can be steely when she wants. She certainly knew when to stick the knife into her former leader Helmut Kohl when the time was ripe. David Cameron's crass misjudgement of where his party's best interests lie, in terms of European alignments, could unfortunately have serious repercussions for Britain.

Angela Merkel is no longer just the apparent 'token woman' in photo line-ups of EU or G8 leaders. She positively oozes authority and competence, in contrast to counterparts such as the superannuated Italian Lothario Silvio Berlusconi or the flash Frenchman Nicolas Sarkozy. Those two men do nonetheless have the *nous* to keep close to her politically, as any sensible British Conservative leader should have done.

If the Irish approve the Lisbon Treaty in their second referendum this autumn, as seems highly likely, it will be Frau Merkel who will be seen to be then pushing the European project forward, even if technically the Swedes are occupying the presidential seat.

If David Cameron becomes Prime Minister next year (and increasingly I believe it is if, not when), far from automatically being one of the Big Four political beasts at the heart of Europe, he will look very much out on a limb, which reflects current Tory policy towards the EU, of course. This is bound to weaken Britain's role in European decision-making. Cameron will also stand out for his blatant inexperience, which has already been made painfully obvious, by his politically snubbing Angela Merkel instead of dating her.

Jonathan Fryer's blog can be found at <http://jonathanfryer.wordpress.com>

LD European Group Newsletter

OUR QUAESTOR Bill Newton Dunn

Lib Dems are exceptionally well represented among the leaders of the new European parliament which started in July. This is significant in the powerful new parliament of 736, to which 412 MEPs did not return after the June euro-election.

Sharon Bowles chairs the key Economic & Monetary committee, Diana Wallis continues as one of the parliament's vice-presidents, and I was elected to be one of the parliament's five Quaestors.

By contrast, the Conservatives and Labour each have one committee chair and nothing else. It is true that a Conservative was also elected a vice-president but against the wishes of Cameron so was expelled from the party and is now an independent.

What are Quaestors?

Being a Quaestor has no equivalent in the UK. The German translation means "Council of Wise Men". We are five MEPs, of different parties and nationalities, elected from among the 736 MEPs, to run the parliament "for its members" (rather than for the staff and administration). In other words, for the benefit of MEPs and not for the benefit of the euro version of Sir Humphrey.

The photo shows us at our first informal coffee together in Brussels. From left to right, Astrid Lulling (Christian-Democrat from Luxembourg), myself, Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg a Socialist musician from Poland, Jim Higgins of Fine Gael from Dublin, and Jiri Mastalka a communist doctor from the Czech Republic.

We oversee security, in-house exhibitions, the register of lobbyists, the MEP register of financial interests, access for visitors, the bars and restaurants, the information offices in the 27 national capitals, allowances and expenses and complaints about them from MEPs, in-house facilities like the Post Office and the supermarket, and indeed anything else that is raised with us by the other 731 MEPs. I suspect that I shall be busy.



LDEG events at Conference

LIBERAL GOALS IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT

Andrew Duff MEP

Saturday 19th September 2009, 13.00-14.00, Marriott Highcliff Hotel, Old Harry's
Supported by the Federal Union
Andrew will also be signing copies of his new book, "Saving the European Union".

CAN PRO EUROPEANS WIN ELECTIONS? LOOKING BACK AT 2009 AND FORWARD TO 2010 & 2014

Catherine Bearder MEP, Chris Davies MEP, Willie Rennie MP,
Graham Watson MEP

Sunday 20th September 2009, 13.00-14.00, Premier Inn Bournemouth Central, Connect 1
Supported by the European Movement

WHAT CAN EUROPE ACHIEVE AT THE COPENHAGEN SUMMIT ON CLIMATE CHANGE?

Fiona Hall MEP; Jo Swinson MP; Chris Davies MEP

Tuesday 22nd September 2009, 13.00-14.00
Premier Inn Bournemouth Central, Connect 2
Co-organised by Chris Davies MEP

Phil Bennion, September 2009

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Contributions from members for website and Newsletter are welcome.

Articles can cover any area which would appeal to other members of the party.

The European Election campaign and subsequent results turned out to be a curious mixture of relief and disappointment for those of us involved. The relief was that we managed to hold our seats in a reduced UK quota of MEPs; the disappointment was that the campaign was hijacked by the expenses scandals in Westminster and that our messages were not being heard. The promise of an increase in our vote share went unfulfilled and our held seats became, if anything, a little less secure.

The biggest frustration was the increase in support for UKIP as a direct reaction to the scandals, despite them having the worst record in this respect within the European Parliament. Things could have been much different had the media made this the story of the last week of the campaign. Politicians did their bit, with Ed Davey making the point strongly on the Today programme and David Cameron doing so in the broadsheet press. I spent the week in a combination of haranguing voters in town centres and early morning visits to talk to farmers at livestock markets across the West Midlands.

The hit rate in dissuading potential UKIP voters was remarkable. Most were unaware of the UKIP record in the last parliament and I met no one who was aware that UKIP take no part in amending draft legislation. This empty chair attitude did not impress anyone. Rather than feeling elated that I was having so much success, I was alarmed at the level of short-term support for UKIP that I encountered. I am convinced that had the log started to roll in the media on the record of UKIP on both propriety and absenteeism the results of the election would have been very different.

Our own vice chair of LDEG, Catherine Bearder, was defending the marginal second seat in the South East, and her success gave us cause for celebration, as did the news that staunch LDEG supporter Bill Newton Dunn had held the East Midlands seat, (technically a gain, as we previously held the last seat in a longer list). A few more Lib Dem votes at the expense of UKIP could have held us the second seat in the North West, regained the second seat in the South West, won a second seat in London and one in Wales. These were all realistic ambitions.

So, whence from here? I am determined that the main focus of LDEG should be to elect more Lib Dem MEPs in 2014. Clearly, the committee and our members will be hard pressed to achieve this alone. One of the projects that we are planning is a regular email newsletter on European issues that can be easily adapted for Focus articles. This will only be useful if we can get it to Focus editors across the UK and if the content is useful.

We must start now if we are to make an impact in five years time. Liberal Democrats at all levels need to persuade the electorate that not only is the EU a vital part of our future in addressing global problems, but that Liberal Democrats are the party they can trust both to reform the EU to make it more accountable and to deliver the policies that they want. I welcome any ideas from members that will help bring this about.

The effectiveness of LDEG as an organisation depends on its membership. I urge you all to help in any way that you can. If you do not have time to be an active member, please continue to pay your subscription. This is vital for us to continue and expand our activities. We can only achieve our aims for 2014 with your help.



What's your vision for the future of Europe?

The EU is the most sophisticated response to the challenges of globalisation anywhere in the world – based on the realisation that nation-states do not maintain their sovereignty by standing aside from their neighbours or by rejecting international bonds; they maintain it by engaging with neighbours and working with them for common aims. We can't tackle climate change on our own – we need the EU's members to take a lead together. The financial crisis laid bare the need for European co-operation on regulating financial services. If we want to deal with cross-border crime, the EU is our best tool. And in a world where China, Russia and India's influence is growing and where Europe's challenges come more and more from outside its borders, we need a strong European voice on the world stage.

At the moment, the EU is seen by too many in Britain as part of the gap between people and power in Europe – part of a sense that democratic control is slipping away. But the EU can actually be a way of giving power back to people, allowing their representatives to exercise real control over issues which affect their lives. I want to see an EU focussed on delivering for its people on those issues – on climate change, on the financial crisis, on cross-border crime – and one which people can see as a way of closing the democratic deficit, not widening it.

What are the three most important reasons in your mind for ratification of the Lisbon Treaty?

First of all, the Lisbon Treaty would make Europe more accountable to the people it serves. Giving more powers to elected MEPs, making the Council of Ministers meet in public when making laws and allowing a million people to require the Commission consider new laws represent a major step forward for democracy in the EU – and Liberal Democrats have called for greater democracy at EU level for years.

Second, Lisbon would make the EU institutions more efficient in a Union of 27 – and, hopefully, soon to be 28, 29 or more – member states. If Britain wants action on the issues which concern it – energy liberalisation, say, or reform of the CAP – we need the EU to be able to function effectively. At the moment, we run the risk of paralysis. Crucially, in particular, the new institutions for foreign and security policy would allow the EU to be more cohesive in areas where we agree.

Finally, though, I hope that after Lisbon we can move on from the old debate about institutions. Of course, that debate is an important one – but we must never forget that it's ultimately a debate about how to deliver better policies, how to implement them more effectively and how to make sure Europe can get on with making life better for its people. Once the debate over Lisbon is settled, we need to move on to improving Europe's policies rather than its treaties.

Should banks be regulated at a European level?

We certainly need tighter regulation of the City and the banking system and the EU has a major role to play. Labour and the Conservatives have

resisted proper regulation for decades – leading to record levels of debt and playing a large role in our current economic crisis. The EU is vital in helping to get a grip on the behaviour of credit institutions. In particular, we need more co-operation between national financial services authorities and the European Central Bank.

Should we join the Euro in the next 5 years?

The euro has held up better than sterling in the financial crisis and has become a major reserve currency for many countries outside Europe. As LDEG members will know, the Liberal Democrats believe that it is in Britain's ultimate interest to be part of the euro. Membership of the single currency would help Britain improve economic stability and boost trade and investment.

I don't think we can set a date on this at the moment. Britain should join when the economic conditions are right, provided the British people vote 'Yes' in a referendum. Having said that, I do think that the financial crisis and the impact it's had on the British economy means that the arguments are changing, though – the massive devaluation of sterling and our degree of exposure to fluctuations in financial services make the argument for membership of the eurozone increasingly strong.

Do you support a law for civil partnerships made in one EU member state to be recognised in all member states?

I know that Sharon Bowles has been doing great work on this and I think it's crucial that all EU citizens should be able to exercise their rights regardless of sexual orientation. It's very clear that we need to push for mutual recognition of civil partnerships and equivalent relationships across Europe. Of course, Liberal Democrats also support introducing same-sex marriage in the UK.

Why do you think Labour oppose a European-wide charter of safeguards for defendants in criminal proceedings? Would this answer public concerns when a British citizen is arrested or tried in another EU state?

Labour have never had the courage to make the case for European co-operation in general, and certainly not in criminal matters. Furthermore, their record at home has of course been deeply illiberal – so it's not surprising that their lack of concern for British freedoms spreads to their policy at EU level.

I very much support action to establish common rights in criminal proceedings across the EU – so that British nationals arrested in another European country have the right to a lawyer, legal aid and an interpreter. Of course, this has been a problem in cases such as that of the British plane spotters arrested in Greece in 2001. I think this would go a long way towards addressing civil liberties, as opposed to simple Eurosceptic concerns about the current operation of the European Arrest Warrant – since the UK's standards in this field are generally higher than those of most other member states.

Nick Clegg

Q&A

Nick responds to a range of questions from LDEG Executive

An excerpt from his reply appears here, with the full document being available on the LDEG website at www.ldeg.org to coincide with the start of the autumn's Federal Conference in Bournemouth.

What should Europe aim to achieve at Copenhagen in December?

I think we have a real chance of progress at Copenhagen – and we need to seize it. The election of President Obama presents both an opportunity and a challenge to the EU. Europe should aim to join forces with the United States in securing create a new and ambitious international treaty which includes all major industrial and developing countries. This is an area where the EU can and must lead by example, too – for instance, by extending its emissions trading scheme to include other harmful greenhouse gases and more areas of business such as shipping.

Should security of access to energy, food, and other essential raw materials be a major concern and what is the right approach to it? Can Europe rely on Russia, India, or China in the long-term for resources?

Energy security is clearly an increasing concern – which is why the Liberal Democrats outlined a strategy to deliver energy independence for the UK within the EU by 2050. We need to put in place a credible strategy to meet the UK's 2020 renewables targets and source all energy requirements from within the EU by 2030 so that the country does not need to import energy from unstable regimes. In the meantime, energy liberalisation within the EU is extremely important – partially because an integrated energy market puts the EU in a much stronger position when negotiating with countries such as Russia.

With respect to trade, we believe in a liberal and open system that increases economic growth and jobs and also takes account of environmental and social standards too. The EU has a key role to play in salvaging the Doha development round of the World Trade Organisation, including eliminating trade barriers and production subsidies in agriculture. Ultimately, a strong multilateral framework is our best security – in trade as elsewhere.

Full Q&A available at www.ldeg.org

Scotland

While the European Parliament may seem remote to many of my new constituents in Scotland, for me it is like a home from home. I was a member of the so-called “rainbow” Scottish Parliament between 2003 and 2007.

It was comprised of members from the full range of the political spectrum – from Nationalists to Socialists, Liberals to Conservatives, Greens to Independents, and even a member of the Senior Citizens’ Union Party.

This Parliament mirrored the true reflection of Scottish society. On my arrival to the European Parliament it was clear that it too mirrors the unwieldy population it serves, only on a much greater scale. The similarities do not end there.

In order to better serve their constituents, both Parliaments seek more powers. On this matter, however, the similarities come to an end rather abruptly. The fight for a revision of the devolution settlement in Scotland has gathered pace, while the prospect of more powers being handed over to the European Parliament is met with hostility on the British side of the English Channel, with the Lisbon Treaty viewed with scepticism at best.

The powers that the European Parliament already has can, however, be used to great effect. In order for this to happen, and to accommodate the sheer range of views held in the European Parliament, another similarity is clear – coalition politics. Alliances are formed, deals are made, and laws are passed. While this process is familiar to me having served in two coalition Governments, the issues have changed.

From transport and healthcare in Scotland, I am now tackling cross border issues – climate change, consumer affairs and common agricultural policies.

My time at the Scottish Parliament taught me that the people you serve must feel part of the institution. Ten years of devolution has achieved this in Scotland but even after thirty years, the European Parliament still feels distant, remote and irrelevant to many Scots.

My first priority over the next five years is to prove that both Parliaments, Scottish and European, can have a positive impact on their lives. No easy task, but with the many similarities I have already discovered at least I’ll be able to hit the ground running.



GEORGE LYON
Liberal Democrat MEP for Scotland

South East

Catherine Bearder,
ex-Vice-Chair of LDEG and newly elected MEP
writes:

“So what’s it like then, all that travelling?”

That is what I am being asked all the time now. It’s difficult to answer really as not so much has happened since my election. It seems to be all stop and go!

First there was the hurtle up to polling day on 4th June, then nothing for 3 days until the count; then again nothing until the 29th June when it was finally to Brussels where a bewildering number of forms were pressed into my hands by various parliamentary officers at tables in the corridors. Forms for my office, forms about my bank accounts, forms for my travel details, forms for the website and oh, a quick picture for the badge – and I didn’t have time to look in a mirror! Some I am sure were forms to keep track of the forms.

However with no office assigned yet to the newly elected (we were not to become MEPs till the 14th July), it was more a case of perching on borrowed desks and wandering the numerous corridors in the Parliament buildings.

I did find the strangely numbered floor five and a half, 5.5 or 5 ½ depending on which sign you came across, where the secretariat of the ALDE group resides, and I am told that many old hands still find that difficult.

Wheeling and dealing for committee places and chairs took place in these two weeks, then off to Strasbourg for the 3rd week to confirm these places.

The Parliament is a building designed to confuse and bewilder the most accomplished at orienteering, and for those suffering from vertigo (me) its glass lifts are alarming. Here though I eventually became an MEP and as the European anthem rang out I took my place in the large wooden egg – sorry,



the hemicycle that is the parliamentary chamber. I also got an office, but so far have nothing to put in it.

So, now finally an MEP and with my office in Brussels I was to find out what the committees do that I am to serve on – REGI and INTA - that's Regional Development and International Trade. Getting my bearings with floors and lifts is just the start of my learning, the abbreviations are also going to be a challenge.) They are great committees, fit well with my previous council and community work and my environmental concerns.



Diana Wallis re-elected Vice President

When the newly-elected European Parliament met in July my colleagues voted me to continue in my role as a Vice President for the next two and a half years. In doing so I have become the first British female politician of any political persuasion to be elected as a Vice President for two terms. It is a great honour indeed. I served two and a half years as a Vice President from 2007 until the end of the mandate in June. I enjoyed the experience enormously; indeed it was an enormous privilege and I was very happy to put myself up as a candidate for a further two and a half years.

There are fourteen Vice Presidents in total. They can replace the President in performing his duties when necessary, including chairing plenary sittings. Since January 2007, I chaired Parliament's plenary for over 75 hours. This includes chairing voting sessions, debates on legislation, debates on human rights issues, and Question Time to the Commission and Council.

Vice Presidents are also members of the Bureau, the body responsible for all administrative, staff and organisational matters of the Parliament. It is extremely useful for the party to have someone so central to the workings of the European Parliament. They take on particular responsibilities on behalf of the European Parliament. One of my key roles as Vice-President was for transparency and access to documents and I have fought for an open EU and, especially, for the Parliament to retain its place as the champion of transparency among the institutions.

I was the Vice-President responsible for the Northern Dimension, which includes relations with the Nordic Council, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Parliamentary Conference of the Arctic Region. I have always thought that the EU, with its history of multilateralism, was well placed to bring something to the debate about future governance in the Arctic. Given the rapid changes in the Arctic, it seems to me increasingly important that parliamentarians of these countries have a role. Otherwise there is a trend that debates in this region become ones of national sovereignty and result in bilateral dialogue at best or conflicts at worst.



CATHERINE BEARDER (seated) is one of our Liberal Democrat South East MEPs

As we all now assemble again at the end of August following the four weeks we get for our break, the experienced MEPs are getting back into the swing of their committees and George Lyon and I are finding our feet and getting to grips with the work.

I can see I am going to have a chance to really *Make a Difference* and deliver on Liberal Democrat promises – that is what we were sent here to do after all!

As a former solicitor and the party's spokesperson on the Legal Affairs Committee, I have wanted to foster a common judicial culture. I sit as the European Parliament's representative on the European Law Academy based in Trier and I have a strong link to the work of the European Court of Justice. The European Parliament has always had a special connection with the European Court of Justice. Whilst the directly elected Parliament represents the peoples of Europe and is the starting point of the legislative process, the Court can be seen as an end-point of the process and a final connection to citizens, upholding their right to an effective remedy at EU level. Both the Parliament and the Court of Justice act in their own distinct way as vital constitutional checks on the Union's activities.

As I said, to be able to continue as a Vice President is a huge honour for me. It also enables me to actively pursue several issues that have been engaging me over the past years. Whether that is the effect of climate change in the Arctic or transparency of the working of the Parliament they are very core Liberal Democrat issues.

Diana Wallis is Liberal Democrat MEP for Yorkshire & the Humber and a Vice President of the European Parliament.

Women Liberal Democrats

Who are we?

The Women Liberal Democrats is an offset group to the official party. We are open to all members of the party. We give a voice to the women of the party. As one of the oldest groups in the country, dating back to 1887, our aim is simple. Gender equality.

What do we do?

It is easy to see that women are still not equal in many areas of life. One of these being parliament. We strive to promote equality within Politics. We organise a number of different activities to change this: organise training sessions, workshops and meeting, support female candidates whether it be at a local level or national. We also encourage women to become or stay active within politics, campaign on the behalf of women and much more.

For more information visit our website <http://wld.org.uk/>

Or email us at women@libdems.org.uk or call us on 020 7227 1208

Cutting Emissions and Doubling Food Production

Incompatible Targets?

The world has recently woken up to the prospect of the Malthusian nightmare of population rising faster than food production, after decades of assuming that surplus production was the problem to be addressed. That this arises as we try to address climate change and the eventual inevitability of declining fossil fuel supplies is not a random coincidence. However, the level of panic in some parts of the media is unwarranted, although useful in raising awareness that food security cannot be taken for granted. Those who see food security in purely national or European terms are mistaken; the potential output of the UK and Europe should be seen in terms of a contribution to global food security rather than self-sufficiency. The potential to increase world food production is considerable, but both the necessity and possibility of doubling it by 2050 must be questioned. The necessity assumes continued population growth, increases in meat consumption and failure to reduce waste. The possibility assumes a combination of a step change in yields and a huge increase in the area of agricultural land. Both of these routes have implications on the emission of greenhouse gases and climate change.

Bringing abandoned farmland back into use will deliver much of the required increase in production with relatively small negative environmental side effects. This is already happening in Brazil as a result of the 2008 price spike, but we should not assume that this would fill the gap. If, however, large tracts of virgin land are required, the loss of major carbon sinks will have a profound effect on emissions. The purported 100m ha of abandoned land in Brazil is partly back in production and there is anecdotal evidence that some was never agricultural land in the first place, but the Cairns Group of agricultural exporters could probably increase production significantly without using virgin land.

Far more land has been abandoned in the poorest countries of the world, largely as a result of export subsidies and dumping, with the USA and EU major culprits. I drafted a motion to Liberal International Congress last year that proposed, amongst other things,

that aid budgets be re-focused on agricultural production. President Wade of Senegal took much of the motion forward to the FAO Food Summit in Rome and since then the G8 has agreed that agriculture should become an aid priority. Agreement has been reached at the WTO to end export subsidies by 2014, so overall there is some reason for optimism. However, much of this abandoned land is of low productivity and will require significant investment to reinstate. Agreements are all well and good, but action on the ground is vital. Volatile output prices will also hold back the process, as farmers on much of this land will not be certain enough of making a profit.

Increasing yields on existing land also presents a risk of increased emissions from agriculture. Fertiliser nitrogen is effectively almost pure energy and contributes around 50% of agriculture's carbon footprint, but it more than doubles the yield of many staple crops. We are currently seeing yields of wheat in Russia and the Ukraine increase rapidly as modern methods are adopted and more fertiliser is applied. However, increasing the use of nitrogen not only raises CO₂ emissions from agriculture but also those of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas far more potent than CO₂. If we are going to increase yields without compromising greenhouse gas targets, it is clear that we need to do much more in technological terms than simply increasing inputs. This means embracing technological advances in agriculture as well as viewing the efficient use of resources to produce high yields as a desirable outcome.

There is evidence that the price spike of 2008 has changed public attitudes. There is a renewed concern about abandonment of agricultural land, a recognition that research should focus on producing high yields with low greenhouse gas emissions, a growing public realisation that biotechnology will play a key role in crop improvement and research into ruminant diets is already cutting methane emissions. The EU and USA will continue to reform their agricultural policies such that the productive capacity of land is maintained without causing abandonment elsewhere. However, we

still need a more rational approach to the use of pesticides (which in most cases reduce the carbon footprint per tonne of output) and more research on exploring the potential of nitrogen fixation to reduce dependence on fertiliser. We also need to pay much more attention to phosphate use and the utilisation of crop by-products as a source of energy and raw materials. Some advocate restricting meat eating, but I would reject anything as illiberal. Information on the carbon footprint of the food we eat should be encouraged and alongside price signals, will deliver a gradual change in habits.

The world can avoid a food supply crisis in the coming decades and still meet challenging targets for greenhouse gas emissions, but only if the global population begins to level out, governments adopt sensible agricultural policies that avoid both protectionism and land abandonment and the public take a more positive view of technological advance in agriculture. This is a tall order and the least line of resistance in the short to medium term will probably be the loss of more rainforest and other virgin lands. Only a robust and binding deal at Copenhagen can mitigate this. When reality bites and we have more deficit world harvests like the one of 2007 public attitudes will change, but they may turn against measures to combat climate change. Politicians will need to show more courageous leadership if we are to avert this scenario.

Dr Phil Bennion is currently chairing a DEFRA LINK research project on minimising nitrous oxide emissions from agriculture, as well as being Chair of LDEG.

LDEG Membership

We're updating our email addresses so we can keep in touch. If you are a member and want to be added to our list please send an email to our Membership Secretary, Adrian Trett trett8@aol.com

**If you're not a member
please do join us!**

How do you feel about becoming Leader of the Lib Dem MEPs?

It is a great privilege and a considerable challenge, and I'm very grateful to colleagues who encouraged me to put my name forward. We joke that women are taking over the ALDE group, as the German, French and British delegations are all now led by women.

What do you think will be the most important issues in the new parliament?

Three issues stand out.

First, the consequences of the economic crisis have by no means totally played out, even though some European countries are edging out of recession. Unemployment is still rising steeply, reaching levels not seen for over a decade. The challenge is how to invest in jobs strategically, not necessarily to preserve the status quo but using a transformational approach, so that we come out of the recession with a much greener economy. A good example of this can be seen in North East England, where Nissan is now turning to battery production for electric cars and a network of charging points is being planned across the region.

Secondly, climate change is always going to be on the agenda and will dominate the headlines in the weeks up to the Copenhagen conference. With climate change taking place faster and more forcefully than predicted, Copenhagen is the world's last chance for capping global warming at a rise of 2 degrees C.

In December 2008, MEPs along with national government ministers in the Council passed a raft of climate change legislation covering CO2 reductions and renewable energy. The weakest link in that package of legislation was the agreement on Emissions Trading, where industry pressurised the political negotiators into accepting a number of loopholes and concessions.

But under the 2008 legislation, if we get a global agreement in Copenhagen - as we must - then the 20% by 2020 cut in greenhouse gas emissions will be ratcheted up to a 30% cut. Climate experts are concerned that even this 30% reduction will not be enough to get climate change under control. So we face a huge political challenge. The planet cannot afford politicians to fudge the deal on emissions reductions: because you cannot argue with the laws of physics.

Antony Hook interviews Fiona Hall, MEP leader Liberal Democrat MEPs

Thirdly, there is the Lisbon Treaty. It is as if a curtain has been drawn across the month of October with no-one daring to discuss what will happen if and when the Treaty does finally come into force. The Irish referendum is not the end of the process but the beginning. The implementation of the Treaty will bring with it a series of opportunities for elected politicians - both in the European Parliament and in Westminster - to get involved in European-level decision-making in new ways. The challenge for us as Lib Dems is to spell out those opportunities and encourage people to make use of new mechanisms such as petitions.

What lessons can be drawn from this year's European elections?

This year's European elections were frustrating because Lib Dem candidates had a strong story to tell about the advantages of working together in Europe - we were denied any opportunity to get that message across because of the Westminster expenses issue.

Nevertheless, in those areas where Lib Dems had integrated campaigns, with European, national and local politicians working together, we did pretty well. The lesson I

draw from that is that we are all Lib Dems, we are in this together, and despite the not insignificant practical difficulties we should spend as much time helping each other as possible.

What can party members do to help?

My number one ask would be for all able-bodied members to go out and deliver some leaflets. In the North East European Elections, those areas which had received regular Lib Dem literature saw Lib Dems coming top of the poll. In some areas where we had no deliverers, we came fifth.

A leaflet through someone's door remains the most effective way for Liberal Democrats to counter the biased and inaccurate messages coming out of much of the British media. Of course new methods of electronic campaigning are important too - but there is still nothing to beat the immediacy of a good leaflet.

How can we increase the profile of MEPs within the party?

We need to get MEPs out of the ghetto of "Europe". MEPs do not do "Europe". MEPs do crime, security, civil liberties, finance, climate change, energy, biodiversity, agriculture, fisheries, international development ... with a particular emphasis on the European level of decision making in these areas. At present, party policy has a worrying tendency to overlook and omit that European angle, or to report it inaccurately.

What should be the Liberal Democrat vision for the future of Europe?

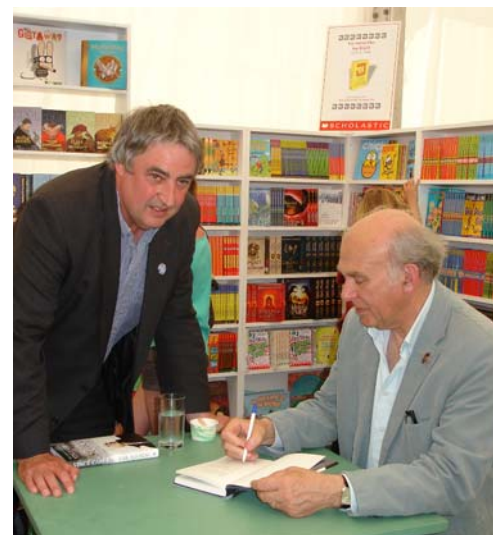
My personal vision is of a United Kingdom at ease in the EU and putting energy into being the highly influential European partner that it deserves to be. So much effort is expended unnecessarily at the moment in defending a very narrow definition of "British interest" on issues such as the Euro, Schengen and the budget rebate.

Promoting the European Liberal Democrat message



Our Shadow Chancellor, Vince Cable, appeared at this year's Hay Literary Festival, where LDEG supported his talk on economics to an audience of around 1300 people. Our Chairman, Phil Bennion, *photographed right*, having his copy of Vince's book signed by the author himself.

LDEG is always seeking opportunities to promote the European Liberal Democrat message to people across the political spectrum. If you have suggestions as to events we might support, or are willing to help us do this then please contact Antony Hook at events@ldeg.org



UK STAMPS ON EU

Kevin Hannon,
West Midlands European Movement:

Brussels bashing is one of the favourite pastimes of UK newspaper editors. Just this week I saw several more front-page articles filled with outrage and outrageous claims about the increase in UK contributions to the allegedly enormously wasteful burden that the EU is for the UK.

Are such claims true? Have those paragons of meticulous accuracy the British newspapers revealed the true extent of the crippling burden the EU lays upon the UK? Of course they haven't. And so in this article I'm going to show you how to work it out for yourself very simply. As the philosopher Leibniz used to say "Let us calculate."

UK STAMPS

But first a little question. Which would cost a UK inhabitant more per day – to be in the EU or to post a letter to it? Answer – the letter, and by a cost ratio of more than 3 to 1. The cost of stamp for a letter from the UK to Europe is 56 pence. If you divide the net annual UK contribution to the EU budget by the number of inhabitants of the UK, about 60 million (actually a bit more), and then by the number of days in the year, the result is between 11p per day per person and 15p per day per person, depending upon which of the last seven years you pick for making this calculation.

If we don't want to think about UK matters in terms of stamps to Johnny Foreigner then we can think in terms of the cost of being in the EU in terms of 2nd class postage stamps, presently 30p each. In which case the net daily contribution per UK inhabitant to the EU comes to about half the cost of a second class stamp or maybe as much as 2/3 in an expensive year. Astonishing – but true.

EU IN STAMPS

It is very easy to calculate this sort of thing, and not just for the EU contribution. The media and politicians speak every day about billions of pounds for this or that. What is useful and highly revealing is to turn a billion pounds, which is 1000 x a million pounds (the US convention of what makes a billion is now the one in general use) into pence per day per person in the UK. To do

that you have to divide one billion by 60 million people x 365 days. 60 million x 365 gives a big number, 21.9 billion, let's say 22 billion for rounding up. If you divide one billion pounds by 22 billion the result £ 0.04545 recurring, which is 4.5 pence to you and me. With that little number of 4.5 pence we can turn billions of pounds into pounds and pence per person per day in the UK.

And so using tables in a series of UK Treasury publications on European Community Finances we can turn their billions into costs per day per person in the UK with our little 4.5p

I use figures from HM Treasury publications Cm 6134, Cm 6770, Cm 7090, Cm 7462, Technical Annex II in every case, because that Annex corrects for discrepancies between UK government figures and EU Commission figures.

Results are as follows:

2004	3.091 billions x 4.5p = 13.9 pence per UK inhabitant per day
2005	2.386 billions x 4.5p = 10.7 pence per UK inhabitant per day
2006	2.786 billions x 4.5p = 12.5 pence per UK inhabitant per day

Figures for later years are less exact because they are UK government figures, which do not include payments from the EU to the private sector, and they may or may not include UK contributions to the EU aid programme which are not direct payments to the EU. That said they are very similar to those above.

The UK treasury figures for net payments to EC institutions excluding overseas aid, but not allowing for receipts to the private sector, which would reduce net contribution, for financial years 2007-8 and 2008-9 are 3.405 billion pounds and 2.996 billion pounds respectively; as given in Table 3.2 in Cm 7462. They would give us 15.3 pence per day and 13.5 pence per day respectively. It matters very little which set of official figures you analyse or which year, the results vary very little and always come out at about the same size and always will. The cost per person per day for inhabitants of the UK for their contribution to EU finances is about half the cost of a second class postage stamp.

UK SPENDING IN STAMPS

Meanwhile as the rapacious EU is taking its fractions of 2nd class postage stamps off us what is our brilliant UK government spending on our behalf? You know the one, the government that likes fighting wars in the Middle East, spending billions on ID cards and giving loads of money to incompetent bankers. I suggest that you be sitting down before you read these numbers, which derive from HM Treasury PESA 2009.

Total UK public sector spending 2007-8 is £582.7 billions. Which is about £9,700 per inhabitant per year. Or, $582.7 \times 4.5p = £26.22$ per person per day, which would buy 87.4 2nd class postage stamps.

Public sector debt interest is 5.4% of that £582.7bn, which is £31.5bn (about 10 times our annual EU contribution).

$31.5 \times 4.5p = £1.42$ per person per day, which would buy 4.7 stamps. And this number will rise sharply because the public sector borrowing requirement is expected to rocket up to about £175bn next year (12.5% of UK GDP); which is to say that public borrowing may come close to £3000 per inhabitant next year.

$175 \times 4.5p = £7.88$ per person per day which would buy 26.25 stamps. The government is accumulating debts for us taxpayers at the rate of about a quarter of the value of the whole economy every 2 years.

The above horrifying numbers put into perspective our UK annual contribution to the EU budget. As a proportion of the annual turnover of the UK economy, and compared to UK government spending, payments to the EU are tiny. It can easily cost a decade or more of UK contributions to the EU to buy one lousy, incompetent British bank! Which is more of a burden to the UK economy – the EU or our own banks? When you analyse the numbers, when you get down to the realities of scale involved in this apparently complex issue of UK payments to the EU the results are obvious and consistent. The UK pays a tiny entrance fee to be in the richest and most powerful trading bloc in the world, a bloc with which we have about 60% of our trade. Political parties such as UKIP that would have us pull out of the EU would destroy our position as a trading country, plunge the economy into dire poverty and provoke a fiscal Armageddon as investors take their money and run; and we'll save half a postage stamp a day each! Such savings we can do without.

A POSTSCRIPT IN STAMPS

A conversion table for putting billions of pounds per year into an average amount per UK inhabitant per day, in terms of the cost of UK 2nd class postage stamps. (Stamps at August 2009 price of 30 pence.)

Total turnover of UK economy in 2008: approximately £1400 billions
 $1400 \times 4.5p = £63 = 210$ stamps per inhabitant per day.

Total UK Public sector spending 2007-8: £583 billions.
 $583 \times 4.5p = £26.24 = 87.5$ stamps per inhabitant per day.

UK Net Payments to EU institutions 2007-8: approximately £3.4 billions.
 $3.4 \times 4.5p = 15.3$ pence = 0.5 (1/2) a stamp per inhabitant per day.