

Quarterly Report

Richard chosen to lead constitution debate

Richard Corbett has been chosen to steer the proposed EU constitutional treaty through the European Parliament.

Together with co-rapporteur Inigo Mendez de Vigo, Richard was selected by the Parliament's constitutional affairs



committee to author the report that will provide a basis for parliamentary debate this autumn.

The European Parliament will be the first elected parliament to vote on the new treaty. It has already begun detailed scrutiny, and will reach its conclusions after a major debate in December.

"I want to put the issue under the democratic spotlight," said Richard. "The conclusions drawn by MEPs will set the tone for the discussion across the continent."

He added that the European Parliament's role will be partly pedagogical.

"Members are drawn from both government and opposition parties across all 25 countries of the EU, all of whom will be obliged to examine the issues, to have an informed and in-depth examination of the issues, and to reach their own position.

"So our debate here will kick-start a similar series of debates across the EU.

"I'm sure that, once people see the facts rather than the myths about the draft treaty, they will realise that it makes the EU more democratic, more accountable and more efficient."

Contents

Richard chosen to lead constitution debate	1
How MPs could influence Europe	2
Europe at the Olympics	2
Rhubarb wins EU recognition	3
Report on all-postal voting	3
Meetings and events this quarter	3

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How MPs could influence Europe

MPs have sought Richard's advice on how they can have more influence in the European Union.

He was invited to appear before the House of Commons Modernisation Committee to give evidence on how Parliament can work more closely with the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers – the two bodies which jointly adopt European laws.

The issue of how MPs scrutinise European legislation, and how EU laws are transposed into UK law, was recently brought to the fore when CBI director Digby Jones said that MPs were "asleep on the job" when checking European laws.

"It is vital that national parliaments play a full part in all the decisions that we take at a European level," Richard said. "The Committee is looking at how our own Parliament can be more effective in its scrutiny

of EU decision-making."

His five recommendations were:

- **MPs should not treat EU matters as 'foreign policy'.** Most EU decisions are on domestic subjects such as the environment.
- **UK ministers should appear before MPs** before they meet with their counterparts from other countries in the Council, so they can explain the position they intend to take and listen to the views of MPs from all parties.
- **MPs should scrutinise how EU law is transposed into British law,** to help prevent so-called 'gold-plating' by UK civil servants.
- **The European scrutiny committee should meet in public** – like all European Parliament committees – rather than behind closed doors.
- **MPs should take advantage of the expertise of MEPs** where appropriate.

The results of the Committee's investigations will be published in a report in the next session of Parliament.

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Europe at the Olympics

A recent tabloid story suggested that the British athletes will soon be competing under an EU flag.

This story originates in an idea of Romano Prodi's, the outgoing European Commission president, that the European flag could be used *as well as* the flags of individual countries. This is just an idea, not even a formal proposal. And besides, it's not nearly as radical as it sounds.

Here in Britain, we already compete in international events at a number of levels. In football and rugby we play as England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but we compete as Great Britain in the Olympics. And our golfers compete for Europe in the Ryder Cup.

So using different flags for different levels of identity is something we already do regularly – but the appropriate flag at the Olympics is the national one, not the European.

Athletes	Golds	Medals
EU	83	286
US	35	103

But it is interesting to see that the medals table does put us ahead of America if we add up all the EU countries together!

Meetings and events attended this quarter

in addition to normal parliamentary activities

Labour Party

- Shipley CLP garden party
- Shipley CLP meeting with Ian McCartney MP, chair of the Labour Party
- Vale of York CLP *
- Huddersfield CLP * (tbc)

Yorkshire

- Yorkshire TV event at York races
- Yorkshire Coal Task Force
- Lord Mayor's Charity Dinner in Sheffield
- CBI Yorkshire
- European Movement Congress, Sheffield *
- Yorkshire Rural Support Network, Harrogate

Brussels

- Herman von Rompuy, Belgian minister of state
- World Wildlife Fund
- National Farmers' Union
- Visiting delegation of Japanese socialist MPs and trade unions *
- Trans-European Political Studies Association *
- Interviews with various academics
- Peter Mandelson, Commissioner-designate
- Roger Liddle, No 10 policy advisor on Europe
- Philip French, FA Premier League
- Solidar—co-ordination of social and environmental NGOs
- Commissioner Wallström, new Vice President of the Commission
- British chamber of commerce
- Karel de Groote Hoogshole
- GMB

Strasbourg

- CBI
- ETUC
- BBC reception
- British chamber of commerce

London & others

- James Madison Trust conference on the European constitution, Canterbury *
- House of Commons modernisation committee
- French embassy event
- House of Commons debate on the European constitution
- Jack Straw MP
- Charles Clarke MP
- Chris Pond MP
- Baroness Scotland
- John Grant, UK ambassador to the EU

Rhubarb wins EU recognition

An EU scheme to register and protect cultural foods from around Europe has recognised the produce of the apparently world-famous Yorkshire Rhubarb Triangle as a unique regional food—much to the delight of the growers and gourmets who flock to Wakefield's rhubarb festival every year. The move will protect the Yorkshire rhubarb brand across the EU from cheap imitations by growers elsewhere.



Report on all-postal voting

The Electoral Commission has just published its report on all-postal voting in the recent European and local elections.

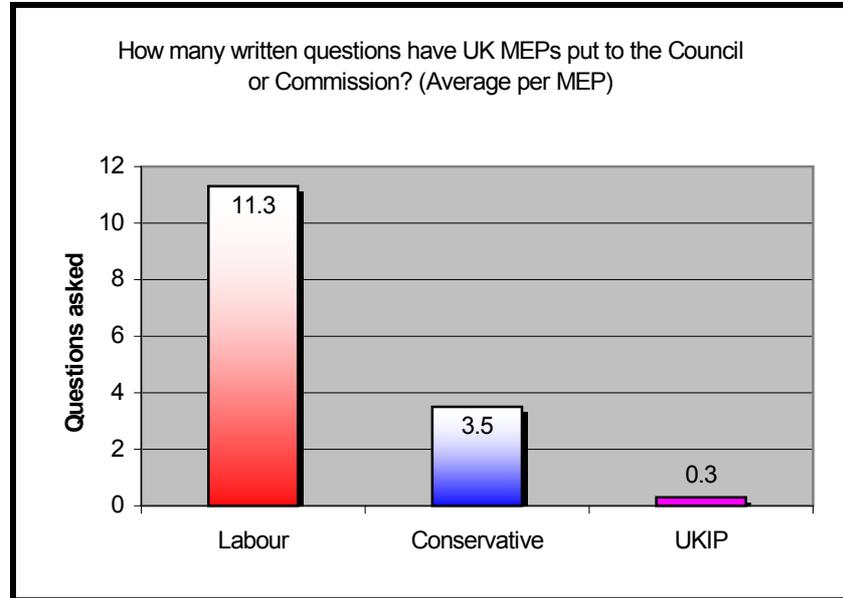
The report made a number of very useful observations about the all-postal voting trial in Yorkshire and the Humber. Most significant was that all-postal voting increased turnout and voter participation exactly as everyone hoped.

As for the teething problems, the Commission re-emphasised that it finds no evidence that all-postal voting increases fraud, and that those difficulties which did arise are perfectly solvable – that's exactly what we would hope for from an electoral experiment.

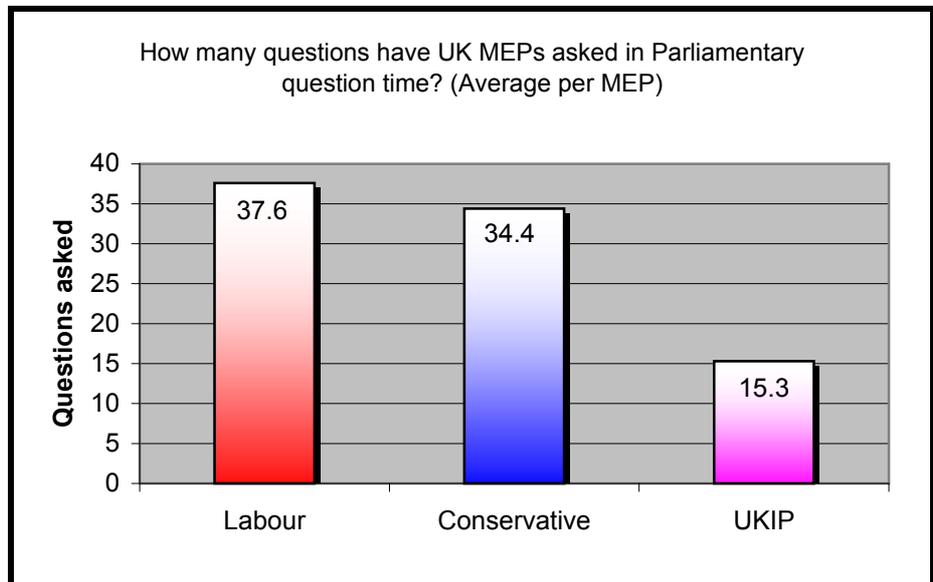
Interestingly, the reason the Commission felt unable to recommend a repeat of all-postal voting was mainly due to the public and media perception of the new system – not to problems with the system itself, despite the insistence of the press!

The government is committed to increasing citizens' participation in the electoral process, and we will continue to work with the Electoral Commission to achieve this.

How hardworking were your MEPs in 1999-2004? UKIP compared to the two main parties



Written questions are one way in which MEPs hold Commissioners and ministers to account.



Question time questions are another way MEPs can hold Commissioners and ministers to account.

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