

SCOTTISH MEPS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE AND FUNCTION AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF ELECTORAL REFORM

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As the momentum towards devolution in the UK gathered pace, debate focused primarily on the structures and processes required in order to devolve power to the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, and on the relationship between the institutions in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Belfast. Consequently, there has been little debate concerning changes to the ways MEPs are selected and elected in 1998-1999, and the impact of this upon their functions and roles.

In the first part of this article there is an examination of how MEPs in Scotland view their role and functions, and the way they currently seek to represent both their constituency interests, and the interests of Scotland as a whole in the European Parliament. The second section analyses the nature and likely impact of the new regional electoral system for Scotland on the role and function of MEPs.

THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF MEPS IN SCOTLAND

Of the eight MEPs elected in Scotland in June 1994, six had university degrees; three were either teachers or lecturers, two were trade union officials and manual workers; and of the other three, one was a stockbroker/political campaigner, one a surveyor and one a lawyer; one claimed to have no foreign languages, most had a little or more French, and four also spoke some

This research was concluded before the death of Allan Macartney in August 1998.

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Scottish Affairs

Spanish; Winnie Ewing was the only one to have been a member before direct elections, first becoming a member in 1975, as a result of a deal between the Scottish National Party and Prime Minister Harold Wilson; one entered in 1979 (retiring in 1999), three entered the European Parliament in 1984, one in 1989 and one in 1994. In the June 1994 election six were elected standing for Labour and two for the SNP. Two held important positions in the European Parliament (1994-1999): one was Vice-President (David Martin) and another was 'Chair of Chairs' (Ken Collins). Ken Collins as Chair of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection Committee also became known in some circles as 'Mr. Environment', and David Martin produced a number of significant reports for the Institutional Affairs Committee on issues relating in particular to the two 1990's Intergovernmental conferences. Until his death, Allan Macartney was Vice Chair of the Fisheries Committee. Mrs Ewing, given her length of service and for many years her position as the sole representative of the SNP, established a particular reputation as 'Madame Ecosse'.

The Scottish MEPs see the three primary functions of an MEP as:

- representation of their own constituents in the first instance, but a recognition that there could be other interests to represent as well;
- monitoring of EU legislation from a number of perspectives, including that of their constituents, and attempting to either ameliorate perceived weaknesses or dangers or enhance the perceived positive aspects for their local area, Scotland or the United Kingdom more generally;
- raising awareness of the EU and of particular issues relating to the EU within their constituency.

Scottish MEPs identify strongly with their constituencies, not least because for the most part they have lived and worked in the constituency, or in an adjacent area to it, both before and after their election. Consequently they believe they have an inherent understanding of the issues and concerns of their respective areas. Typically this is commonly expressed in the following ways :

'I'm a Lanarkshire lad, I've always lived here, apart from a short spell away and my family are all local. I live here, and identify with the area. I have a feeling for it'

'I was a local councillor'

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

'I have worked among them'.¹

MEPs in the 1994 -1999 European Parliament were also very aware that it was the local parties that had selected, worked and campaigned for them, and that it was the local electorate that had voted for them, although given the size and diverse nature of most of the constituencies, there is no such thing as 'constituency opinion'.

By developing and maintaining close links with the private, public and voluntary sectors within their constituencies, MEPs believe themselves to be in tune with local interests. To maintain this, they have offices in the constituencies and Allan Macartney maintained two offices, 65 miles apart in the two major centres of population, although he dropped radical ideas of adopting a 'satellite' approach with access points in every local party office in the constituency as being too fragmented.

Party links with councillors and constituency party members enable MEPs to remain in touch with local issues, although most constituency parties do not seek to influence their MEPs, partly because the MEPs tend to fall outside some of the traditional party structures, and partly because European issues are still seen as somewhat remote, lacking direct relevance to the world of the party activist, member or even voter. Most local parties, therefore, accept that the MEP may follow an independent line in the traditional sense of 'representation'. Indeed, several MEPs suggested that they have little direct contact with party members. Local parties however do expect to be kept informed of developments by the MEP and this is done by the MEP attending party meetings and sending out newsletters to party members. MEPs are fairly autonomous vis a vis their local party, but for Scottish Labour members there has been a tightening grip from the national UK party and they believe that the Group of the Party of European Socialists in Strasbourg is slowly becoming more and more important.

Some MEPs are also assiduous in visiting local churches and volunteer groups, and it appears as if groups such as Oxfam, Christian Aid and Friends of the Earth are becoming adept at cultivating the MEPs. Particularly important for most MEPs is the relationship with local authorities and enterprise agencies, with MEPs providing advice on funding opportunities in Europe, along with the promotion and support of funding applications in Brussels, when necessary, especially if there is any sense that the

¹ *These and other quotations, unless indicated, are taken from interviews with MEPs in the early summer of 1998*

Scottish Affairs

Commission has been dragging its feet. MEPs can point to specific examples of where they believe their intervention may have made a difference in speeding up the outcome. Although relationships with local authorities have usually transcended party and have worked well regardless of local parochial issues, in one or two cases personality or politics has interfered with the relationship. Local authorities and other local groups do provide their local Member with briefing papers, and for the Scottish MEPs as a whole the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities provides information.

They also receive information more generally from the permanent office of the UK government (UKREP) in Brussels and the Scottish Office, although in this case the political complexion of the government and that of the MEPs appears to come into play; thus the Labour MEPs believe that there has been an improvement since May 1997. In the period up to June 1999, although the Scottish MEPs dealt with Scottish Office ministers, more often it was with the UK minister in London, since on issues like the environment that Minister actually had more responsibility for the issue than Edinburgh.

Whilst Westminster MPs and others may not yet fully have appreciated the changes in the socio-economic and political environment, particularly since the Single European Act of 1986 and the movement towards the Single Internal Market, MEPs are discovering the validity of the Delors' observation made in 1988 that :

there is an unawareness in many national parliaments of the quiet revolution that is taking place, as a result of which 80 per cent at least of economic, financial and perhaps social legislation will be flowing from the Community by 1993.²

Some are also aware that 80% of other areas of policy, such as environmental policy, now emanate from Europe as well.

If Westminster MPs and some constituents are unaware of this dimension, local businesses and councils are not. As most EU legislation has particularly economic implications - for example, the biotechnology directive, the harmonisation of standards or the legislation on open and competitive tendering for contracts - which may impact on the business communities within their constituencies, business groups directly interested do contact their MEPs, as do local councils which are concerned with funding.

² *Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, Debates of the European Parliament No.2-366/155-157 (15 June 1988)*

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

This provides a major incentive for MEPs to scrutinise policy at all stages in the process, alerting attention to potential opportunities and threats, when directly relevant to their constituency. MEPs have been particularly active with regard to major reform proposals such as the European Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals issued in the summer of 1997, which contained the Commission's proposals for the development of the European Union in the period up to 2006. These proposals were produced in the context of future enlargement and the need to reform the Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds, both of particular concern to Scottish interests. Some of the proposed reforms pose potential threats to current local funding levels, especially the Objective 1 status currently enjoyed by the Highlands and Islands. Indeed, MEPs will often contact appropriate local organisations seeking their advice and views on such issues as the implications for them of changes to the size of funds and the funding criteria and, for example, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment re best value, local sourcing, placing conditions of local employment on investors and local authorities' powers in tendering for contracts with approved local contractors.

However, MEPs are generally more reactive than proactive in their constituency work, responding mainly to requests for assistance from business and non-party political interest groups. Whilst MEPs receive a tremendous amount of mail, especially from lobbyists in Brussels and business groups, on average only 10-20 letters per week are received from individual constituents. Most local mail MEPs receive is on animal welfare issues, but issues such as BSE, milk quotas and the environment also feature, while particular individual concerns also produce letters. Many of these letters are concerned with non-European issues. They also receive letters from groups like the BMA (British Medical Association) asking for support, for example, for an EU ban on tobacco advertising. More usually professional lobby groups send mail to the Brussels' offices of the MEPs. Local circumstance and demography can affect the mail bag too: for example, in Strathclyde abortion is an issue because of the proportion of Roman Catholics in the electorate, although the local MEPs appear to be able to take an independent position on the matter.

MEPs are aware that many constituents know that individual MEPs, and indeed the European Parliament itself, only have limited power over a limited range of issues. Constituents are aware, to some extent, that there is 'no government' to eject in the European Union if they feel so inclined. MEPs do complain, however, that, despite their efforts to improve their local profile and to increase awareness of the European Union, individual constituents view their MEP as their final point of contact in the satisfaction of

Scottish Affairs

grievances. All the Scottish MEPs could recall instances in which constituents had approached them with a problem after local councillors or MPs had been unable to assist, even though the issue did not have a European dimension. Also, of those who seek the assistance of their MEP on a European issue, it is often for legal advice on matters for which constituents have intended to seek redress through the European Court of Human Rights, although this is not an institution of the EU. After more than two decades in what is now the EU, confusion still exists not only over the role and function of MEPs, but also over the institutions of the European Union, despite attempts to increase awareness at the local level. Indeed, it is a common complaint that the public are unable to differentiate between an MP and MEP.

MEPs tend to be more widely ~~recognised by~~ their constituents in Scotland than in

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

one or two centres of population. In the larger geographical constituencies, it is regarded as simply impractical to hold surgeries, or indeed to regularly visit all parts of the constituency: it simply takes up too much time. Although Winnie Ewing, and other Scottish MEPs, have conducted summer 'roadshows' to reach all constituents at least once a year, it is not considered to be an effective method. MEPs now concentrate their efforts on ensuring constituents know where to contact them, making individual appointments for those who make contact if it is appropriate, and travelling only to those who require assistance. Most inquiries are dealt with through correspondence, although as noted above the number of individual constituents writing is small. MEPs see groups or representatives of groups much more than individuals per se.

Table 1
Size and Population of 1994-1999 European Parliamentary constituencies

Existing European Constituencies	Size in Hectares	Population
Highlands and Islands	4,016,384	424,494
North East Scotland	1,259,358	720,806
Mid Scotland and Fife	543,761	692,005
Lothians	104,807	641,896
South of Scotland	1,542,461	638,429
Strathclyde East	129,643	649,980
Strathclyde West	199,609	637,634
Glasgow	17,230	593,323

As can be seen from Table 2, MEPs do receive allowances for internal constituency travel, but they find it difficult to spend time in their constituencies, apart from weekends. One claimed that only 15% of his working time was spent in his constituency, and for most Brussels occupies at least four days/nights a week every week apart from the week in Strasbourg once a month.

Most acknowledged that EP committee work and meetings associated with the political group took up most of their time, probably on average over 75% of the average 50 hours per week they worked, with some putting in 60+

Scottish Affairs

hours and a retiring MEP admitting to working slightly less now than in the past, down to 45-48 hours. Committee work is seen not only as time consuming but also as important, and the time spent says something about the nature of the EP itself and how it operates; although not unnaturally some MEPs had reservations about the effectiveness of the time spent. Similarly, plenary meetings were seen mostly as occasions upon which the MEPs were lobby fodder, unless a committee in which they were involved has something on the agenda. Nonetheless, MEPs believe that through their presence and involvement over time they became familiar with how to approach key figures, and who those key figures are. Indeed, it is recognised that the best way of keeping up with what is going on is through personal contacts with officials, especially the EP secretariat and the political group staff. Indeed, the Strasbourg week, despite its location, is regarded as very useful because all the relevant people are in the same place. It is also the case that informal meetings over lunch, dinner or drinks are valued highly. Whilst most decisions are taken in formal meetings formally, behind the scenes negotiations are crucial in working out compromises. Depending on the issues involved, networks can be useful and effective, some being very sophisticated in their organisation and even rather formal in their dealings. But if a new policy area or issue arises, MEPs are thrown back onto what they can pick up on the grapevine.

Table 2
Salary, Expenses and Allowances of MEPs*

salary set at level of national MPs
allowances
general expenditure allowance 3262* ECU per month
for office management, internal constituency travel, and post etc.
flatrate travel allowance
for journeys within EU for purpose of attending official meetings of the European Parliament : ECU 0.76/km for first 400km and ECU 0.38 for each additional kilometre; this covers all costs associated with the journey
journeys outside EU territory : reimbursed tickets
travel allowance for official meetings outside EU
upto 3 000 ECU per year
flatrate subsistence daily allowance
231 ECU per day payable if MEP has signed official attendance register for official meeting in EU

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

remuneration of MEP's assistants

secretarial assistance, allowance of up to ECU 9408 per month; paid direct to the assistant(s) or to third party appointed by MEP to pay salary, tax and social security

* July 1998: 1 ECU = £ 1.5125; 3262 ECU = £2157; 9408 ECU = £6220

Although MEPs claim to represent their constituency interests first and foremost, most of the day to day constituency work is dealt with by researchers and administrative staff, and Table 2 above gives the allowances that an MEP may claim for this work. On average the MEPs appear to employ the equivalent of three full-time staff; one employs all of them in the constituency, because of the importance he attaches to the constituency and especially to the interests of individual citizens; the others divide between those who employ one in the local office and two in Brussels/Strasbourg and those who do vice versa - it may be that how this is organised depends upon the profile and responsibilities of the MEP. It is also the case that it is possible for an MEP to gain additional staff if they hold a position in the Parliament or in a political group. There is also a mix of full time and part time staff. These staff range from 'researchers' to secretarial and office administrators. The former prepare briefing papers, act as policy advisors, and if in Brussels/Strasbourg act as 'wet-nurses' to visitors from the constituency. The latter tend to deal with the diary, constituency correspondence and press releases. It is clear that new technology had made an enormous impact in being able to communicate backwards and forwards, with the contemporary advantages of e-mail, fax and Internet.

All MEPs visit schools to speak to children about the EU, and at least one has produced a video available to all primary schools in his constituency, that outlines his role and the workings of the EU. MEPs also speak, when invited, to business, public and voluntary sector audiences, but the percentage of the electorate who would be able to identify their MEP by name is still too low. The MEPs remain concerned that they have not been as successful at increasing awareness of the EU as they would like to be, blaming the diffuse nature of their constituencies and apathy among constituents. All claimed to find the size of their constituency to be a problem. (See Table 1.)

Although MEPs believe that people are more aware of Europe than was the case twenty years ago, they suggest that most people still do not consider Europe to be relevant to them. People often still believe that Europe has nothing to do with them or that decisions are imposed on the UK by the EU. MEPs are aware that, for most, local and national interests remain of prime

Scottish Affairs

importance. This is one of the factors that explains the low turn-outs in European elections in Scotland.

The majority of an MEP's time is spent in Brussels on committee work, and in Strasbourg at plenary sessions of the European Parliament, as each MEP in Scotland sits on at least one Parliamentary committee. It is impossible for them to develop expertise in all policy areas. Therefore, Scottish MEPs have spread themselves out through the European Parliament's committees, although it cannot always be claimed that there is a direct overt relevance to particular Scottish interests. Although the committees on which they sit may have some relevance to constituency interests, they tend to serve broader interests. (See Table 3.)

Table 3
Scottish MEPs EP Committee membership: June 1998

Scottish Member of the European Parliament	Party	European Parliamentary Committees
Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands)	SNP	Legal Affairs and Citizens Rights
Dr Allan Macartney (North East Scotland)	SNP	Vice-Chair Fisheries; Development and Co-operation
Alex Falconer (Mid Scotland and Fife)	Lab	External Economic Relations
David Martin (Lothians)	Lab	Vice-President of the European Parliament; Legal Affairs and Citizens Rights
Alex Smith (South Scotland)	Lab	External Economic Relations
Ken Collins (Strathclyde East)	Lab	Chair of Chairs Committee; Chair of Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection
Hugh McMahon (Strathclyde West)	Lab	Employment and Social Affairs
Bill Miller (Glasgow)	Lab	Economic & monetary affairs & Industrial Policy

Given that only a small percentage of an MEP's time is spent in the constituency, or directly on narrowly defined constituency business, it may

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

be that the transition to representing a single regional constituency (Scotland) will not be as difficult as might be imagined. Contact with constituents is relatively minimal under the present system, and the majority of the working life of an MEP is spent abroad on committee and other business. There appears to be a difference between what an MEP perceives to be his/her role and function, and the situation in practice.

This raises questions about whom MEPs really represent. Is it Scotland, or the more specific interests of their constituents? Questions over accountability are also raised. Are MEPs perhaps more representative of their national party, or of their European political group?

MEPs argue that their primary allegiance differs depending on the circumstances and the issues involved (although the SNP, as a nationalist party, claims allegiance to Scotland first and foremost), but they generally consider themselves to be accountable in the first instance to the European constituency party that selected them, and to the electorate that voted them into office.

While accountable in the first instance to their constituency party, the relationship is said to be based on trust and mutual support. Once elected, MEPs provide the lead, deciding how best to represent constituency interests especially in situations where there is conflict between different groups within the constituency. Particularly given the size of the European constituencies there is no such thing as constituency opinion, and an MEP is very much a Burkean 'representative' not a delegate. An MEP must weigh up the pros and cons and attempt to provide a balanced position. However, they must be aware that if they march too far out of step with the constituency party, they may not be re-selected for future elections, and some issues, such as abortion, mentioned above, are particularly sensitive in some areas.

However, Labour MEPs suggest that since May 1997 the UK Labour Party has been attempting to exert more influence over the way UK MEPs vote in the European Parliament, raising concerns that MEPs will be more accountable to the party they represent. David Martin (MEP for the Lothians) and Ken Collins (MEP for Strathclyde East) are permitted greater autonomy in their voting behaviour given their high profile positions in the European Parliament, however. As Vice-President, David Martin seeks to avoid voting against the Group of the Party of European Socialists; and as Chair of the Environment, Ken Collins having spent time on negotiating items and compromises through the committee is under some obligation to respect the final outcome of agreements he has played a role in brokering, when the

Scottish Affairs

issue goes before the plenary session. However, there is not a strict whipping system in the Group of the Party of European Socialists, so MEPs can adopt a more UK party position if required to do so; the extent of their voting autonomy depends on the political sensitivity and importance of the issue.

Some MEPs may also vote against their Scottish and other UK colleagues if an issue is of especial concern to them because of their own background or committee involvement. If this occurs they may take the opportunity of the explanation of vote procedure, a 100 word explanation of their vote, which is recorded and which allows the MEP to reinforce in print the stance they have taken. Ultimately they take the view that it is they who push the voting button at the end of the day and on some issues - for example, nuclear issues, economic development and tobacco advertising etc - conscience may be a factor, even if that produces a different result from party, UK or Scottish colleagues.

The SNP particularly have more voting leeway within their European political group, the European Radical Alliance. The two SNP members, of course, discussed the 'SNP stance'. The ERA is made up of a range of parties with different ideological positions that often cannot be reconciled and there is no whip in the ERA. There are no penalties, therefore, for voting differently from the group, although some efforts are made to establish a group position. On certain issues such as the legalisation of drugs they cannot reach a consensus given the divergence between the SNP and Italian members of the group, the former being against legalisation. In such cases the SNP two voted according to conscience or on Scottish lines.

There is occasionally (perhaps two or three times a year) a Scottish position on some issues: fisheries, structural funds, and taxation on whisky. However, it is clear that while the Labour six may try to act together, it is rare for all eight Scottish MEPs to do so; one Labour MEP refuses to work with the nationalists. Some MEPs have developed a particular expertise on questions like the indirect taxation on the drinks industry or the future of structural funding because of the subject's importance to the Scottish economy and employment, and they acknowledge that it can be helpful to have a Scot in the right place in a Commission DG on occasion - there is a certain sense of all being 'Jock Tamsons' Bairns'

SCOTLAND AS A SINGLE EUROPEAN REGION

It was in 1997 that the new Labour government introduced the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, which proposed radical changes to the system

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

of electing British, including Scottish MEPs. In the UK for the June 1999 European Parliament elections there are to be 12 electoral regions: 9 in England, and one each in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the latter of which will continue to elect MEPs by the system of Single Transferable Vote (STV) which has been used there since 1979. In the rest of the UK MEPs will be elected on the basis of a 'regional list system', Scotland for this purpose being one region, and thus in 1999 the eight Scottish MEPs will represent a 'single electoral region', Scotland.

The seats are to be allocated to 'the persons named on the party's list of candidates in the order that they appear on that list', although independent candidates may stand as well. The ranking of the candidates on each party list is a matter for each party, not the elector - that is, it is a closed system. The seats will be allocated in the following way :

- first seat to party (or independent) with greatest number of votes;
- 'The second and subsequent seats shall be allocated in the same way, except that the number of votes given to a party to which one or more seats have already been allocated shall be divided by the number of seats allocated plus one'.

The deposit required per independent or per list is £5000, which will be returned if the party or candidate achieves 2.5% of the votes cast. Questions relating to levels of campaign expenses are still to be resolved.

As a result of the introduction of the regional list system of PR, Scotland will become a single European constituency, aggregating the eight existing European constituencies into one. (See Table 4.)

Table 4
The new constituency

New European constituency	Size in hectares	Population
Scotland	7,716,697	4,998,567

This has given rise to concerns relating to the practical difficulties that the sheer size of such a constituency may engender. Under the present system as noted above, MEPs already experience difficulties in ensuring that all

Scottish Affairs

interests within their constituencies are represented, and admit they have problems maintaining regular contact. There are fears that this problem will become magnified in such a large constituency as Scotland, and that some parts of the country may feel marginalised or peripheralised, particularly if the newly elected MEPs are predominantly based in the Central Belt. As a result, lack of identification with MEPs and with Europe may increase. This may become an even larger problem in the future given that the Treaty of Amsterdam limits the overall size of the European Parliament to 700 MEPs. With a wave of enlargements a point will be reached where Scotland will lose one or more seats.

However, the existing European constituencies are already considered artificial, and therefore not ideal, in that they do not exist other than as regions within the EU for electoral purposes. They cover vast geographic areas that traditionally have little in common (see Table 1 above). Identification under the present system is, therefore, already weak. The people of Blairgowrie in Perthshire, for example, do not consider themselves to be North East Scots, and yet the European constituency that includes them within its boundaries is that of the North East of Scotland. This weak identification with existing European constituencies is UK-wide.

ATTITUDES TO THE REGIONAL LIST SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

The Scottish MEPs are generally unhappy with the new electoral system and some suggest that the system of PR proposed for the European elections in the UK will cause chaos. In effect, they were not consulted over the change. Constituents have problems identifying their MEP under the present system, with no strong or even any sense of regional identification of MEPs to the people. MEPs believe that the situation will get worse under the new system when MEPs will be selected on a regional basis, with the whole of Scotland representing a single region. It is clear even now that even relatively well informed individuals in positions of some influence and power have not fully realised that, under the new system, if they want to promote something in Europe, they will not have someone to promote and represent their interests as they do now. Local enterprise agencies, for example, who liaise with their MEP on European issues will no longer have someone who will be willing to represent their interests above other enterprise agencies in Scotland.

While from the perspective of European integration there might be some advantages in MEPs becoming legislators rather than representatives, since

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

they could then focus on issues rather than parochial concerns, MEPs themselves do not welcome such a change, seeing it as reducing their role as representatives of the people. Even worse they fear they will become representatives merely of the party or the prevailing orthodoxy in the party. MEPs will be under more pressure to work for the party not for a constituency, and they will move to a position of seeing their electorate as their national executive, making party discipline much tighter than at present.

There is also some concern that while after some initial hiccups local organised business groups will not suffer because by and large they have the resources and knowledge to handle information, individual voters will find it difficult to identify and contact an appropriate MEP. Indeed the question arises: who will be the appropriate MEP? Put simply, who is my MEP?

If sitting MEPs are re-elected it may be that they will still be perceived as being regional representatives, and so there would be an element of continuity between the old system and the new. There are likely to be attempts to ensure some continuation of regional elements, but that can probably only survive one election and whether it is possible or not will also depend on the overall size of a party's representation; that is, if a party wins four seats it will be able to divide Scotland into north, east, south and west, at least unofficially, but if a party secures fewer than four seats any pretence at regional representation will prove very difficult. There will be a danger of local electorates, especially in relatively rural, poorly populated areas, becoming alienated, especially if in the Scottish case the result were to produce a 'Central Belt' bias. However, MEPs concede that the regional list system works in other Member States of the European Union, and so it might work here.

It is difficult to predict the outcome of the election as one cannot extrapolate from the current polls given the very much lower levels of turnout in European elections compared to general elections, but at the moment it looks as if the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats will secure no more than one seat each, leaving a relatively even contest between Labour and the SNP for the other six seats.

Turnout for the June 1999 election in Scotland may be even lower than usual since it will follow on from the high profile elections to the first Scottish Parliament in modern times and local government elections in May 1999. Both voters and activists may have run out of steam by then. Even in 1994 turnout was not high - see Table 5.

Table 5
Turnout in the eight Scottish constituencies in June 1994 European election

Constituency	M.E.P.	Electorate	% turnout
Glasgow	Bill Miller	463 364	34.5
Highlands and Islands	Winnie Ewing	328 104	39.1
Lothians	David Martin	520 943	38.7
Scotland Mid and Fife	Alex Falconer	546 060	38.2
Scotland South	Alex Smith	500 643	40.1
Scotland North East	Allan Macartney	575 748	37.7
Strathclyde East	Ken Collins	492 618	37.3
Strathclyde West	Hugh McMahon	489 129	40.0

The new system was adopted because it was apparently believed to be the easiest for the electorate to understand, and it was believed that it could be put in place quickly. Any other system would have involved more discussion, and, it was suggested, speedy implementation was what the Labour Party was most interested in, to ensure delivery of manifesto promises within the timescale set before the 1997 general election. The majority of MEPs believe that there was insufficient discussion, and concern has been expressed over the fact that the final paper was discussed in Cabinet before being hurriedly signed by Jack Straw and Robin Cook (Home and Foreign Secretary respectively). Some MEPs heard about it first from the BBC.

MEPs fear that, as a result of the new electoral system, they will become even further removed from the people. This of course goes against the prevailing official orthodoxy of subsidiarity, of which British governments have made so much in the 1990s, and of a Europe, which the Treaty on European Union mandated should continue 'the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen'.³

³ *Treaty on European Union Article A*

CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCEDURES

Political parties have the power to decide both approved candidates and their position on the list under the new system and procedures currently being implemented. Party elites, with varying degrees of consultation with party members have established criteria for selection, and have dominated selection panels, potentially allocating greater power to the upper echelons of the party hierarchy. The choice of candidate has been moved further from the constituency, allowing them a lesser role in the process of selection.

There is concern among sitting MEPs, particularly Labour representatives, over who will be returned under the new list system (see below for examination of the parties' candidate selection procedures). The positioning of candidates on the regional list to be presented to the electorate is vital. For Labour and SNP candidates it is unlikely that anyone below third place on the list in Scotland will be elected. On the Labour Party list at least one of the top candidates, it was determined, had to be a woman, and despite the fact that two existing MEPs are standing down at the next election, leaving only four Labour MEPs initially contemplating re-election, only two (David Martin and Bill Miller) have any real prospect of success, one did not continue to fight for selection, and one has little prospect of success despite being on the list. None of them can any longer rely on majority votes within their own constituency to return them to office. Party discipline will tighten even further, resulting in prospective candidates toeing the party line, because they have had to vie for a high place on the regional list. This could lead to a narrowing of debate given that there would not be as diverse a range of opinions.

It has also been noticed that elsewhere in Europe footballers and well-known businessmen are placed at the top of party lists, and that their elections are no more than populist campaigns. This opinion was not widely held among Scottish MEPs, however, and is seen as a worse-case scenario that is unlikely to emerge in the UK.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

The party began its selection process in November 1997 by inviting applications to the panel of approved members, and by the end of the year their Campaign and Candidates Committee had completed approval procedures. The Executive of the Liberal Democrats then drew up a short-list and party members selected their candidates using One Member One Vote (OMOV), during their annual internal elections in Spring 1998. They held

Scottish Affairs

hustings for members in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness and Aberdeen prior to the selection ballot.

Scottish Labour Party

Labour has used a lengthy five stage process that began at the end of March 1998. Members interested in standing for election filled out application forms that were then sent to the European Constituency Labour Party (ECLP) where the member was seeking nomination. The application forms were then circulated to Constituency and Branch Parties. These groups could then make new nominations to the list, after which ballot papers were issued by the ECLPs. Voting for candidates took place using OMOV, with ballot papers being returned, in Scotland, by mid-August. All voters had to vote for one male and one female candidate and there was a separate ballot - a 'trigger vote' - on the question of: 'Do you wish ... , your current MEP, to be re-selected as a candidate for the 1999 European elections'? If more than 50% of those eligible to vote were against the MEP standing for re-election he/she had to stand down and be excluded from the selection process. All other candidates were selected in ranked order of preference in the male and female sections. Candidates selected by ECLPs, including MEPs who passed the trigger ballot, were then interviewed by a regional/national panel comprising five members of the National Executive Committee, three members from the region, one national trade union representative, one ethnic minority member and the General Secretary. The panels expressed a commitment to ensure that women are fairly represented at the top of regional lists, with at least one woman on each list; and to improve representation of minorities. Final selection and ranking of candidate lists was undertaken by a joint selection board, based on the recommendations of the panels to ensure national balance.

While two sitting MEPs, David Martin and Bill Miller, emerged as first and second on the Labour list, the placing of two women, Catherine Taylor and Christine May, as third and fourth respectively meant that sitting Labour MEPs were disappointed. Hugh McMahon made the final list, but was not placed sufficiently highly to have any realistic prospect of success.

Scottish National Party

At a special party conference in Perth in June 1998, the SNP met to discuss the selection processes to be employed by the party for both Scottish and European Parliamentary elections. A four stage selection process was endorsed by conference delegates and the party's constitution duly amended. The selection of SNP European candidates was as follows:

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

Stage 1: Beginning in July 1998 an approved register of possible candidates was issued to Constituency Associations. These groups put forward names from the register to represent their European electoral region, which is being retained for the purposes of candidate selection for the 1999 European election.

Stage 2: At close of nominations in early August 1998, branches met to discuss nominations prior to:

Stage 3: A series of Regional (i.e. European Constituency) Primary Selection Meetings. Each region nominated one candidate for the list, and the list of candidates was issued to the party by the beginning of September 1998.

Stage 4: Branches and Constituency Associations met to discuss ranking prior to the party's annual conference in Inverness in late September, at which delegates voted to rank the eight candidates in the order in which they will appear on the final list to be presented to the electorate at the European election in June 1999.

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

The Scottish Conservative Party has also established a selection process that can be broken down into clear stages.

Stage 1: A short list of ten candidates (eight plus two reserves) was drawn up by the party's European Selection Committee.

Stage 2: Hustings took place in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness during November 1998 at which all Conservative party members were invited to vote for their preferred candidate and to rank candidates in order of preference.

Stage 3: The final selections and rankings were decided by the aggregate scores from all four hustings, and candidates rated according to member's preference

THE NEW ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCEDURES

Electoral reform in the UK, aimed at bringing the British system in line with the rest of the EU Member States, according to the government, has resulted not only in the introduction of a regional list system of proportional representation to replace the traditional first-past-the-post system, but also in

Scottish Affairs

changes to the way in which candidates will be selected by the political parties, and in the way these parties will campaign during European elections.

However, the idea that Britain will somehow conform to Europe-wide procedures by adopting this new system is misleading. Although the Treaty of Rome laid out in Article 138 (3) that the European Parliament should 'draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all member states', this article has never been fully implemented. The European Parliament itself has repeatedly backed electoral reform by 2:1 majorities, most recently in 1998, but these efforts have been thwarted by Member State opposition in the Council. Under the treaty it is the Member States that have the final word on the electoral system.

European parliamentary elections still take place using national systems, and indeed are overwhelmingly national campaigns, not co-ordinated Europe-wide campaigns, and so the claims that the new British system represents a moving into line with Europe are debatable. The change does, however, represent a move away from the previous Conservative government's clear and unwavering opposition to proportional representation, and may be part of the strategy to attempt to prove to our European partners that the present UK government will be less obstructive in EU affairs than their predecessors.

As mentioned previously, according to Labour sources, the version of PR chosen by the Labour government and confirmed by the European Parliamentary Elections Bill 1998 is one of the easiest to understand and one of the least complicated to put in place. These sources also claim that the government was more interested in a system that could be put in place quickly in order to fulfil manifesto promises. They need to be seen to be delivering. However, the idea that the electorate is not sophisticated enough to be able to cope with PR has been disproved elsewhere in states where more complicated forms of proportional representation have been introduced, for example, New Zealand and Northern Ireland, where voters appear to have coped well with electoral reform.

Although there is a great deal of evidence to show that voters structure their votes along party lines rather than for individual candidates (Johnston, Pattie and Rossiter 1998), which is consistent with the version of PR selected for British European elections, there are a variety of reasons for criticising the proposed system.

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

Focus group research, for example, shows that the electorate considers greater choice for voters to be an important quality of a reformed electoral system (Ellis 1998). The question arises, then, who should choose the peoples' representatives, the people or the parties?

When the sophistry is put aside, the issue clarifies into that of where the political power should reside, to what extent with the voter and to what extent with the party?

(Editorial comment, **Representation** Vol 35 1998, p.6)

The system to be applied demonstrably favours the political parties. Although great play is made of the member's notional accountability to his/her electors, less play is made of his/her real accountability to party, and its potential for elective dictatorship. In the new UK system, it should be noted that all the major parties other than Labour are allowing their membership to rank the candidates on the party list, although at the election itself the voter will not have that opportunity. Labour has argued that 1999 is possibly a 'one-off' in this regard, and was necessary because in the transition they were anxious to secure geographical, gender and ethnic representation. They have also indicated to the House of Lords that they may review the possibility of open lists for subsequent European elections.

If improving democracy is the main concern for implementing PR, then a system that redresses the balance in favour of the electorate would surely have been the one to go for, not a closed list system that reduces voter choice. And, although the government suggests that the electoral system proposed will also bring the British system of electing its MEPs more in line with the rest of the European Union, this is at the very most only partially the case. There is a variety of systems of PR employed by the Member States of the Union, and Britain's adoption of PR will not result in the harmonisation of electoral systems across the EU. In fact the version chosen by the UK appears to conflict with the apparent desired intent of the EU, to bring decision-making closer to the people.

There are more democratic models of PR that would have allowed the voter greater choice. For example, in Belgium voters may cast their vote for either the party or an independent candidate, or for particular candidates on a party list. Seats are then allocated in a two stage process that firstly distributes seats to parties, and then allocates seats to candidates based on preference votes. Similar systems exist in the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria. Although parties in these states rank the lists, which of the candidates are elected is determined by both preference and party votes, and so the

Scottish Affairs

electorate has greater choice than under a closed list system. PR in Finland and Luxembourg is geared even more towards encouraging maximum voter choice, given that lists are not ordered, which allows the electorate to determine which candidates are successful (Seyd 1998).

The concern of Scottish MEPs is that they will become no more than representatives of the party in a system that, depending on the procedures employed for selecting and ranking candidates, will severely reduce not only the influence of the electorate but also of rank and file party members. There are also concerns among MEPs that they will become no more than legislators in Europe: lobby fodder for the national party or European group, as their representative role is reduced and their links with the electorate diminish.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCOTTISH MEPS, WESTMINSTER AND THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

After the summer of 1999, the political landscape in Scotland will be transformed by the establishment of the new Scottish Parliament. It is still unclear what system will be established for links between that new Parliament and MPs and MEPs.

At present there is no formal mechanism by which MEPs can liaise with the national Parliament, although Scottish MEPs claim to have generally good working relationships with the Westminster MPs in their constituencies. Also, relations with the Scottish Office are said to have improved since Labour won the 1997 general election. As a result MEPs have an indirect, informal link with the United Kingdom Parliament.

Several proposals for the new situation have been put forward. For example, the MEP for Strathclyde West, Hugh McMahon, has proposed a forum in which Scottish MEPs, Scottish Ministers and Scottish Committee of the Regions Representatives could meet and discuss EU issues; he suggests this would enable a more strategic and coherent approach to European affairs to be developed. The creation of a report-back mechanism from the Council of Ministers to the Scottish Parliament might engender greater two-way communication. David Martin has put forward the idea that a Scottish Minister for Europe be created, whilst others suggest that at the very least MEPs should be called on to provide advice to a European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. Greater co-operation between MSPs and MEPs within parties will also aid the process of information exchange. A Scottish office in

Scottish MEPs' Perceptions of Their Role

Brussels is also sought. Through improved communication and a higher profile in Brussels, it is claimed that dialogue over European legislation could be improved. MEPs generally call for greater communication between all levels of government and suggest that after devolution in the UK there should be closer co-operation between the Scottish Parliament and Scottish MEPs.

Nonetheless, the strictures of the White Paper of July 1997, **Scotland's Parliament** must be borne in mind. The White Paper says that :

The UK government wishes to involve the Scottish Executive [of the Scottish Parliament] as directly and fully as possible in the Government's decision-making on the matter [of EU policy]

but it goes on :

This will require, of course, mutual respect for the confidentiality of those discussions and adherence to the resultant UK line without which it would be impossible to maintain such close working relationships.
(para.5.4)

Subsequent paragraphs (5.6) re-iterate that the Scottish Executive must stay loyal to and advance the UK line. This may make open discussion with and the involvement of all future Scottish MEPs a little problematical. As the White Paper makes clear, Scotland will have limited influence over European and foreign affairs, which remain the competence of the British government.

Scotland's MEPs all claim to prefer the consensual style of politics in the European Union over the more adversarial style of politics in the UK, but are pessimistic about the style of politics that will emerge after devolution. Although much has been made of the potential for the Scottish Parliament to establish a new political system, there is some scepticism that this will happen, as evidenced by some of the proposals of the preparatory Consultative Steering Group. Scottish Office officials and Scottish ministers are still said to be talking in the same terms as their Westminster counterparts, and have been criticised for not understanding about power sharing, only about having and using power directly.

CONCLUSION - IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

1999 then will be a momentous year in Scottish and British politics. Two great constitutional reforms will occur more or less simultaneously. Both

Scottish Affairs

directly relate to the issues of electoral systems and representation. The 1999 election to the European Parliament could also prove crucial in determining the long-term attitude to both the European Union and political participation in general among the electorate. It is ironic that devolution will bring some power closer to that electorate, but that elections to the European Parliament will take it further away!

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