

European Community

News Release

EUROPE'S PARLIAMENT UNVEILED

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By Stephen Milligan, who writes on EC affairs for The Economist, the London weekly journal.

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It must have been a dream. There was Italian Communist Enrico Berlinguer in an armchair. Ten yards away stood the former Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans giving a radio interview. And suddenly from nowhere came Jacques Chirac, the French Gaullist, ambling along with the aid of a stick. Rarely before in history have so many great politicians from so many countries been gathered together.

The cynics say that it may be the first and last time. They predict that the stars will seldom be seen again at Strasbourg - after the first session. Certainly, the procedural wrangling of the second day, which forced Michael O'Kennedy, the Irish Foreign Minister, and Roy Jenkins, the EC Commission President, to hang around for half a day before they could deliver their speeches, may deter the stars in future. But Willy Brandt, for one, says he will come to the Parliament whenever anything important happens.

The French may have pulled off a coup in getting Simone Veil elected as President, but their quota of stars was sadly lacking. Communist leader Georges Marchais was on holiday in Yugoslavia. François Mitterand, the Socialist leader, had already resigned his seat in protest at the decision of the French authorities to give one seat won by his list to Mrs. Veil's. And two members of Mrs. Veil's list - Jean-François Deniau and Pierre Mehaignerie - had resigned because French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing asked them to stay on as ministers in his government. No one is allowed to be a minister and a Euro-MP at the same time.

One MP who had failed to understand the complex electoral rules was also missing: Shelagh Roberts, the Conservative winner in London South-West. It turned out that she was a member of Britain's Occupational Pensions Board at the time of the election - although she resigned soon afterwards. Under British law, no one can be an MP and draw a salary for a public job - save as a minister. Miss Roberts was therefore barred from taking her Euro-seat, and will have to fight a by-election in September to get her seat back. This will be the first ever Euro-by-election and, since her seat is marginal, is likely to generate a lot of excitement.

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Money matters

While Euro-MPs were discussing lofty matters like the future of Europe inside the Strasbourg chamber, outside they were more worried about how much cash they were going to get for the job. All MPs are being paid the same as their national MPs back home: this is fine for the well-paid countries like Germany, but not so good for the poorer countries. However, British MPs are now earning 50 per cent more than they expected, thanks to a handsome pay raise awarded to both British Euro-MPs and Westminster MPs by the new Thatcher government.

However, all Euro-MPs will get the same expenses: around \$54,000 will be available for each MP for his secretary, research staff, office, etc. On top of this he will get some \$160 a day expenses allowance and about \$0.67 for each kilometre travelled.

Which city?

Strasbourg did its best to welcome the new MPs. The city provided special charter planes to fly MPs direct to Strasbourg (with an excellent meal on board). The city's mayor laid on a grand reception and a special concert on Wednesday evening. But many MPs made it clear that they hope that the Parliament will move away from Strasbourg as soon as possible.

The most militant opponents of Strasbourg are the British Conservatives. They would like the Parliament to meet all the time in Brussels or, at the worst, in Brussels and Luxembourg. At present, the full sessions are due to be held in Strasbourg and Luxembourg, and the committee meetings in Brussels.

Strasbourg has good historic reasons for being the site of the Parliament. Standing as it does on the frontier of France and Germany, it symbolizes the postwar friendship of the two countries that is at the heart of the European Community. But its transport links are poor - and there is not enough hotel space for the 410 MPs, aides, diplomats and journalists.

But if Strasbourg has its problems, Luxembourg's are even worse. As yet, Luxembourg has no chamber big enough to hold all 410 MPs, but it is working day and night to build one - shaped like a ski-jump. The first session will probably not be held in Luxembourg before 1980, but when Euro-MPs get there, they will find that the city has 2,000 hotel beds. Only one hotel is near the Parliament.

Transport is also a problem. The best way of commuting between the three cities is by train. But the company that runs the twice-a-day Trans-Europe-Expresses has already axed one service and may axe the other. Happily, the French Government has promised to subsidize a service, if necessary. But even on the best train of the day, it still takes over 4 1/2 hours to get from Brussels to Strasbourg.

EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY 108 Seats
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Christian People's Party (Belgium)	7
Social Christian Party (Belgium)	3
Christian Democratic Union (Germany)	34
Christian Social Union (Germany)	8
Union for France in Europe	9
Fine Gael (Ireland)	4
Christian Democratic Party (Italy)	29
South Tyrol People's Party (Italy)	1
Christian Socialist People's Party (Luxembourg)	3
Christian Democratic Party (Netherlands)	10

LIBERAL AND DEMOCRAT GROUP 40 Seats
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Reform and Freedom Party (Belgium)	2
Party for Freedom and Progress (Belgium)	2
Liberal Party (Denmark)	3
Free Democratic Party (Germany)	4
Union for France in Europe	17
Independent (Ireland)	1
Liberal Party (Italy)	3
Republican Party (Italy)	2
Liberal Democratic Party (Luxembourg)	2
Liberal Party (Netherlands)	4

EUROPEAN DEMOCRATS +++++	64 Seats +++++
Conservative Party (UK)	60
Official Ulster Unionist	1
Conservative People's Party (Denmark)	2
Centre Democracy (Denmark)	1
EUROPEAN DEMOCRATS FOR PROGRESS +++++	22 Seats +++++
Progress Party (Denmark)	1
Defence of the Interests of France in Europe	15
Fianna Fail (Ireland)	5
Scottish Nationalist Party	1
MISCELLANEOUS (GROUP FOR TECHNICAL COORDINATION AND +++++ DEFENSE OF GROUPS AND INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARIANS)	11 Seats +++++
People's Union (Belgium)	1
Popular Movement against the EC (Denmark)	4
Radical Party (Italy)	3
Democratic Party of Proletarian Unity (Italy)	1
Proletarian Democracy (Italy)	1
Independent (Ireland)	1