

REPORT

European Elections: the results

Problems with Sunday-night "Election Special"

The results of the first European Elections will start to come out on the evening of Sunday 10 June. As a result of discussions in the Council of Ministers, it is expected that all countries except Ireland (where the position is not yet certain) will now be counting that night.

This decision was announced to the European Parliament on Wednesday 17 January by French Foreign Secretary Jean François-Poncet. Earlier it had been pointed out by Parliament's elections rapporteur, Schelto Patijn (Soc/NL) that the announcement of the results at the same time in all Member States was crucial if the European Broadcasting Union was to transmit its planned multi-national "Election Special".

There are still, however, severe problems. Mr Patijn pressed the Minister to say what the position was in Italy, where the Bill before the *Camera dei Deputati* did not provide for the polls to close on 10 June until 10 p.m. "We have pointed this out to the Italian Parliament", the Minister replied, "and we presume that positive account will be taken".

But on the night of Friday 19 January the *Camera* passed the Bill unamended. Faced with the possibility

of an imminent Government collapse and a general election, Italian MPs preferred to pass the Bill as it stood rather than risk losing it altogether.

The position in the United Kingdom is also complex. Here, arrangements have been made for the count to take place in two stages.

On the evening of Thursday 7 June, after the close of the poll at 10 p.m., the ballot boxes will be opened, and the ballot counts will be verified — that is, the papers will be counted *face down* and the numbers checked against the record of papers issued. Then, the papers will be resealed in the boxes, and conveyed to a central point in each Euro-constituency ready for the count proper. This will, in fact, save a great deal of time on Sunday night, since verification can occupy up to two-thirds of the counting process.

But will all the counts actually take place on Sunday night? British law leaves the timing of the count entirely up to individual returning officers. Clearly, it will be more costly to count on Sunday than on Monday. On the other hand, if most UK results are held over, the impact of the Sunday night results programme could be ruined.

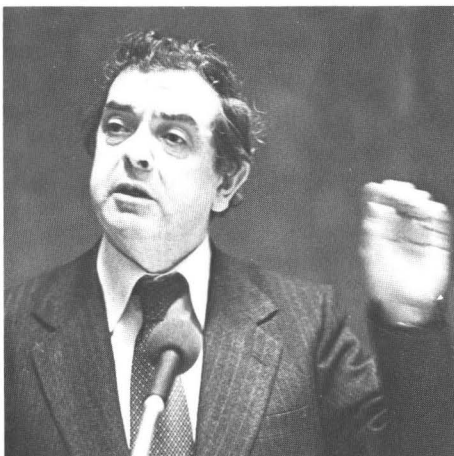
The gift of tongues

"When I hear the word 'culture', I reach for my revolver," the late Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering is popularly supposed to have remarked. Such threats seemed to have been effective on the evening of Wednesday 17 January, when the European Parliament began a debate on "Community action in the cultural sector"—it was eventually cut off at nine as the result of staff trade union pressure (see page 4).

When it was resumed next morning, however, everything was changed. Lord St. Oswald, speaking for the Conservatives, observed that "the spiritual uplift of song and sight" was needed in times of economic gloom; and suggested that the Scots, for example, should be able to watch French television programmes if they so wished.

It was language, indeed, that then brought the debate alive. "Dyma'r tro cyntaf i mi siarad yn fy mamiaith yn y senedd hon," Tom Ellis (Soc/UK) began his speech, "a dewisaf y ddadl bresennol ar ddiwylliant i

wnevd hynny."* That was as far as he got. Parliament vice-President Pierre Deschamps (who comes from Belgium, a country with its own linguistic complications) intervened from the chair to insist that Mr Ellis spoke in one of the official Community languages. The rules of procedure were consulted, and Ron Brown (Soc/UK) objected that there was nothing in them to prevent a Member speaking any language he liked. Tom Ellis himself pointed out that Parliament had in the past coped with speeches in both Spanish and



Tom Ellis

Portuguese; and he had, in any case, distributed translations to the interpreters. Minority languages were an important part of Europe's cultural heritage. There followed pleas on behalf of Occitanic (from French Socialist Pierre Lagorce) and for Gael from Russell Johnston (Lib/UK).

Ancient monuments

But the Chair was firm; and Mr Ellis soon made it clear why the issue was a political one. "To speak a minority language is itself a revolutionary act," he quoted (in English) from Sartre; "it strikes at the heart of capitalism". With the agreement of Mr Deschamps, the issue was referred to the Parliament's Rules Committee.

For the rest, Members were particularly concerned about Europe's architectural heritage. Certain minimal Community funds are already available in this field; and it was suggested by Carlo Meinz (Lib/Lux) that the European Investment Bank might be enabled to give loans for the restoration of ancient monuments.

*This is the first time for me to speak in my mother tongue in this Parliament and I choose the present debate on culture to do it.

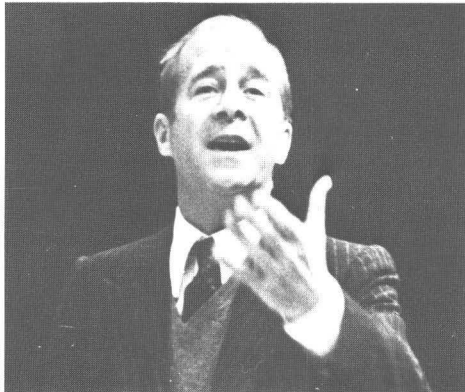
The French Presidency

The President of the Council of Ministers from January to June this year is French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet. According to tradition, he outlined the programme for the French presidency in the European Parliament on Wednesday 17 January.

Three issues were of immediate importance.

1. The Community Budget

Here, the Minister went little further than confirming the Council of Ministers view that the 1979 budgetary procedure had *not*, so far been completed (see January EPR). Irrespective of what had been voted on expenditure, it required an explicit



Jean François-Poncet

vote by the Council on the "maximum rate" for the revenue to be authorised. Later in the debate this view was directly contradicted by Conservative leader (and QC) Geoffrey Rippon; and, at the end of the debate, by Parliament President Emilio Colombo himself.

2. European Elections

Though welcoming the elections, the French Minister gave Parliament a warning that it should exercise its powers "with due respect for the rights of the other Community institutions and of the national parliaments".

3. European Monetary System

On a more optimistic note, the Minister thought a solution would soon be found to the main problem so far: the French demand that agricultural Monetary Compensatory Amounts be phased out. Here he received warm support from Geoffrey Rippon.

Safety at Sea

The 50 lives lost in the Bantry Bay disaster showed how vital it was for Community Member States to conform to certain international

conventions on maritime safety, Commissioner Richard Burke told the House on Tuesday 16 January.

He and the Council had already decided to recommend to member states ratification of safety codes drawn up under the auspices of the United Nations.



Photo Keystone Press Agency

But the Commissioner did not hold out much hope of financial assistance to those affected by the disaster. Despite pleas by Fianna Fail members that the exploding tanker, the *Betelgeuse*, was a Community vessel built in a Community port and crewed by Community materials, the Community scope for action was limited because this was an industrial accident and not an industrial disaster.

ACP-EEC in Bordeaux

Problems in the present Lomé Convention and the form of its successor, were on the agenda when participants from some sixty-five countries gathered in the Hotel Aquitania in Bordeaux-lac, France from 29 January to 1 February for the meeting of the Joint Committee of the Lomé Convention Consultative Assembly. There was a public opening ceremony attended by Mr Jacques Chaban-Delmas, President of the French National Assembly and Mayor of Bordeaux.

Questions

"One of the most important duties of Members of this Parliament", Senator Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl), and a Parliament Vice-President reminded the House on Monday 15 January, "is . . . to find out, amidst the labyrinthine complexities of EEC affairs, just what is happening. . ." One of their principal weapons was the written question, to which the Commission was supposed to provide answers within one month.

Why was it, then, that the answers were often not only "inadequate,

not to say evasive", but also late? In December 1978, for example, 117 MEPs' questions had not been answered within the month, some for up to nine months.

The Senator went on to describe some of his own experiences. In July 1978, for example, he had asked a question on fire damage. "The reply I got from the Commission was that they did not have the information. But when did they give it to me? On 8 November!"

Staff shortage

As it happened, it fell to another Irishman, Commissioner Burke to reply. The number of written questions put down by Members, he pointed out, was growing:

1975	750	1977	1,010
1976	810	1978	1,300

This represented a 73% increase since 1975 — and there had been no commensurate increase in Commission staff to deal with them.

The Commissioner also pointed out that the "one month" rule was contained, not in the Treaties, but in Article 45 of Parliament's own Rules of Procedure. This "merits our very great respect" but did not amount to a formal engagement on the part of the Commission. The Commission often could not provide the answers itself, but had to extract them from the nine separate national governments. A single unit in the Commission was now responsible for preparing answers to Parliamentary questions.

VAT bonus

Further moves gradually to harmonise EEC tax laws were backed by the House on Tuesday 16 January. Members voted through a report on the Eighth VAT Directive which provides for refunds of certain VAT charges incurred in other Member States.

Commissioner Burke said this would reduce the dangers of double taxation and would make for fairer competition as refund arrangements would be standardised. An example of where the measure would apply would be the VAT on expenses incurred by foreign exhibitors at a trade fair in a Member State.

Parliament's report said similar arrangements should be made for non-Community countries—a point taken by the Commissioner.

Steel support

The Davignon Plan for steel was better than no plan at all, Sheffield MP John Osborn (Con/UK) told the House on the problems of the iron and steel industry.

And though Mr Osborn and other

members representing steel-producing areas had reservations, there was general recognition that the plan — attempting to control production and prices while the industry is re-structured — had helped matters in the first year of its operation.

Mr Osborn and fellow Conservative, Tom Normanton, were particularly concerned that there should be resistance to “subsidized imports” from inside and outside the Community.

Let's move it

The Council of Ministers is spending so much time looking at the pimples on the body of Europe that it is ignoring the arteries — Europe's transport network, Regional and Transport Committee chairman Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) told the House on Monday 15 January.

His condemnation of Council for “22 years of inactivity” in the sphere of transport was echoed on all sides of the House and there was all-round support for a hard-hitting regional committee report aimed at shaking the Council out of its slumber.

“If there is no proper and unified transport system, there can be no common market,” Lord Bruce concluded. “And the quicker the Council wakes up to this matter the better.”

The report even raises the possibility of taking Council to the Court of Justice for its inactivity on transport and failure to fulfil the Treaties. It calls for Parliament's rapporteurs or committee chairman to be allowed to sit in on Council meetings and criticizes Council's “majestic contempt” for past initiatives on transport.

Malta

“Malta has a true vocation in Europe and we must render this a reality” Lord St. Oswald (Con/UK) urged on Thursday 18 January when the House debated the progress of the association agreement with Malta. The withdrawal of British bases came at a critical time in the island's development, he continued. The expulsion of Herr von Hassel had given rise to anxiety and the Community would do well to establish an information office in Malta to encourage democratic behaviour. George Cunningham (Soc/UK), on the other hand, emphasised that Malta had not become independent from Britain merely to fall under the influence of another country — or political party. It was a pity that Malta's ambassador to the Community doubled up as ambassador to the Vatican. He also noted that Malta's financial problems were growing, and hoped that ratifi-

cation of any agreement would not take too long.

For the Commission Vice-President Haferkamp said that the Commission was to examine EC-Malta relations in April and that the financial protocol included aid amounting to 26m EUA (£17.6m)

Prodigal's return

“An act of faith in democracy in Europe”. This was how Jean-François Pintat (Lib/F) saw the accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal to the Community when he presented his report on the political and institutional aspects of enlargement on Wednesday 17 January. It was important, however, he went on, that the three applicant countries should bring their foreign policies in line with those of the Community as they often voted differently from the rest of the Community in the UN.

Many Members felt particularly that the three applicants should establish relations with the state of Israel. In reply Commissioner Lorenzo Natali said that the mechanism of the transitional period was particularly important, as one should not minimise the economic problems involved in enlargement. President-in-Office of the Council Pierre Bernard Raymond agreed with Tom Normanton (Con/UK) who saw the accession of three newly-democratized states as the return of the prodigal son.

Hot topic

The issue of human rights in Iran was a topical but delicate matter, Jean-Pierre Cot (Soc/F) told Parliament when introducing his resolution on the matter on Thursday 18 January. Parliament must take a moral stand; but not interfere with the domestic political problems of that country.

Warming to his theme, he went on to describe the “atrocious conditions of political prisoners” and — in vivid detail — the “systematic torture” of which they were victims.

This soon led Erhard Jakobsen (Con/Dk) to observe that this was just what Mr Cot had himself warned against. Repression had been going on in Iran for 25 years; why bring it up now? In turn this produced a vigorous rejoinder from Italian Communist Michele Pistillo. He and his group were delighted that the Shah had finally left Iran; and supported those there who were fighting for democracy.

Faced with all this, Commissioner Haferkamp contented himself with assuring the House that the Commission would do all in its power “to encourage a normalisation of the situation in Iran”.

QUESTION TIME

Falkland Isles

Council President Jean François-Poncet told John Osborn (Con/UK) that the Falkland Islands received Community aid by virtue of being a territory for which a Member State has responsibility. He did not know of any further discussions between the Commission and the UK on the subject.

Euroradio

President Jenkins told Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl) that he hoped to set up a Community radio network despite initial setbacks. He assured the House, however, that there would be no “harmonised broadcasting diet”.

Year of the Child

President François-Poncet told Liam Kavanagh (Soc/UK) that, even in 1979 the Year of the Child, it would make nonsense of European integration to separate legislation of particular concern to children from general Community action.

Terrorism

President François-Poncet told Bob Mitchell (Soc/UK) in reply to a question put by Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) that, following a declaration on 8 April 1978 the Nine were endeavouring to coordinate measures to combat terrorism and in particular the abuse of diplomatic privilege.

All those cars

Commissioner Etienne Davignon told John Osborn (Con/UK) that studies estimated that in the year 2000 there would be one car for every 2.6 inhabitants in the Community. He was confident, he said, about attempts to find alternative energy for propulsion of road vehicles. Road traffic he felt was an area for action at local authority level.

Action on December

At its December sitting, Parliament considered 19 Commission “Bills”. Of these, 11 were approved without amendment.

In seven cases, Parliament made amendments which have been accepted by the Commission. These are: textile imports, the wine market, decommissioning nuclear power stations, codes and standards for fast breeder reactors, research on climatology, applied metrology, and the recycling of urban waste.

In one case, the funding of the Guidance Section of the Agricultural Fund, the Commission wishes to keep to its original proposal.

The Grindstone

While British trade unions were out fighting the 5 per cent during the week of 15 January, the European Parliament's staff unions were winning a completely bloodless victory in Strasbourg. The threat of a strike on the very day that French Foreign Secretary Jean François-Poncet was due to make his maiden speech (see EPR 53) was enough to produce the capitulation of Parliament's Bureau on the issue of working hours.

From now on:—

1. Parliament's normal lunch-break will be two hours.
2. On Mondays and Tuesdays Parliament will stop work at 8.00 p.m.
3. On Wednesdays it will, at the latest, stop work at 9.00 p.m.
4. On Thursdays, there may be a late night sitting; but, in this case, there will be a dinner-break between 8.00 and 9.00 p.m.

All very civilised arrangements; which should reassure potential elected Members, worried that the intensity of Euro-politics might cause them to miss out on Strasbourg food.

That mountain

Can you cook enough pastry in your kitchen within one month, to use up 11,000 pounds of butter? If so, you can get it cheap from the Community butter mountain. "Intervention butter" (which one Commission official described as "old, with a nasty taste") has, in fact been available for industrial pastry-making since 1975.

According to French Liberal Henri Caillavet, however, this arrangement amounts to a "distortion of competition" against the small-scale pastry-maker; and he wants the Commission to remove the quantity and time restrictions.



Photo Keystone Press Agency

As for the taste; Mr Caillavet's idea is to add vanilla to the stored butter "since tests have shown that this substance has no adverse effects on the product". Oh, God! Not vanilla-flavoured pork pies again!

Candidate stakes

Though not (so far) anything like as exciting as American primaries, the

selection of candidates for the European Parliament is already producing some interesting confrontations. First past the nomination post for the Conservatives was Sir Fred Catherwood, who pipped farmers' leader Sir Henry Plumb in the Cambridgeshire on 20 January.

But in Northern Ireland a selection conference of truly American proportions (getting on for a thousand were there) picked the Ulster Unionist candidates on 5 January. They are, first, the Party's European Community spokesman and former Northern Ireland Home Affairs Minister, John Taylor; and, second, former Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture Harry West. Appropriately, the conference was held at the Europa Hotel, Belfast.

Although there are three seats to be filled in Northern Ireland (using Single Transferable Vote in a single constituency) the Unionists are only fielding two candidates. This conveniently leaves one place open for SDLP nominee John Hume — except, of course, that Democratic Unionist Leader the Rev. Ian Paisley has already promised to make things exciting by standing himself.

Caucas race

Dynamic French Gaullist leader Jacques Chirac has just come up with an idea for the elected European Parliament (or "Assembly" as he would insist we call it) worthy of the Rev. C. L. Dodgson — better known as Lewis Carroll — himself. Under the French electoral law, a party can put up a list of 81 candidates for the 81 French seats; but the Gaullists (now called the RPR) are only likely to win about 16 of them.

Does this mean the other 65 have lost? Not a bit of it! Under the Chirac scheme, those who get in on 10 June will resign a year later, making way for the next sixteen on the list; and the same the following year; and so on. So that by 1984, everyone will have won a prize!

Pigeonholed

The great European myth is of deadening Brussels bureaucracy through which jungle the ministers of the member states regularly cut a swathe of common sense. That, after all, is the theory behind the invention of the "European Council" when the heads of government get round a table — supposedly to sort out everything when lesser men have failed. Yet, as Mr Lynch found out over EMS, things are never quite as clear cut as the exponents of this theory believe.

As a hint for a New Year resolution for the governments the Commission has published a list of all its proposals

on which the European Parliament has given its views but which still await adoption by the Council. They give credit where it's due; some have been agreed in principle though not formally adopted. But they number 363; and the Parliament's opinion was in some cases given as far back as 1974, (for example that which proposed aid for the Social Fund for people in the shipbuilding industry — the state of which has got immeasurably worse in the intervening five years). And there are thousands of Lancastrians whose interest in a regulation on the quality of drinking water — dormant on the ministerial table since 1976 — is currently probably quite acute.

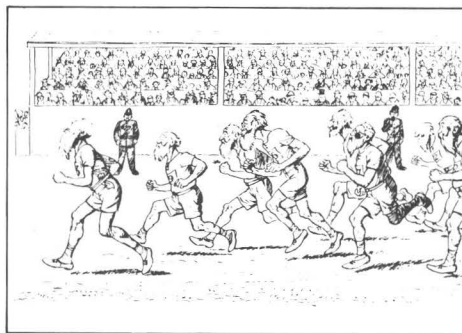


10 girls from the UK (seen here with MEPs Tom Ellis and Michael Shaw) were at the European Parliament in January to receive a special briefing. As from 12 February they will be passing on their knowledge to the British public at exhibitions in many towns and cities.

In with the old

An interesting problem has arisen concerning the first meeting of the elected Parliament on 17 July. Who is to take the chair?

The current Rules of Procedure provide for one answer: the oldest Member is in the chair during presidential and vice-presidential elections. On 17 July he will have to stay there while Members' credentials are verified, Rules of Procedure adopted and elections organised. A position of some importance.



Cartoon courtesy Punch

Who will this oldest member Selection committees seem, on the whole, to be going for youngish candidates, capable of lasting the five years until 1984. But a constituency seeking a moment of fleeting glory might just select some octogenarian. The race is on!

K.P.G.