EU Legislation—Public Awareness of the Scrutiny Role of the House of Lords

Report with Evidence

Ordered to be printed 16 May 2006 and published 25 May 2006

Published by the Authority of the House of Lords

London: The Stationery Office Limited

Price

HL Paper 179
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Oral Evidence, 18 October 2005

Mr Tommy Waidelich, Chairman, European Affairs Committee of the Swedish Parliament, Social Democrat, Mr Carl B Hamilton, Deputy Chairman, Liberal, Mr Fredrik Olovsson, Social Democrat, Ms Eva Arvidsson, Social Democrat, Mr Lars Lindblad, Moderate Party, Ms Annelie Enochsson, Christian Democrat, Mr Sven-Erik Sjöstrand, Left Party, Mr Agne Hansson, Centre Party, Mr Leif Björnlod, Green Party
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(p) refers to a page of written evidence
FOREWORD—What this Report is about

As a contribution to the current “period of reflection”, this Report considers communication initiatives recently launched in Europe and examines the ways in which a number of national parliaments deal with European affairs and communicate European issues to their citizens, including those parliaments which have set up information centres and forums.

The Report makes clear that, rather than seeking to make a case for the setting up of any such centre, our inquiry aimed to explore the ways in which our Committee might, both inside and outside the House, better communicate the work we undertake in holding Ministers and the EU to account in fulfilment of our mandate, which is “To consider European Union documents and other matters relating to the EU”.

We explain why we do not think it would be desirable, or practical, to set up any EU information centre linked to the House of Lords. Instead, on the basis of the evidence we received, we recommend that we improve the promotion and dissemination of our own work. We recommend improvements to our press and publicity strategy, our scrutiny of the Commission Annual Legislative and Work Programme, and to our website. We also consider the presentation and content of our reports and recommend that they be more widely and imaginatively disseminated.

If we promote effectively our own scrutiny of the activities of the EU, which impact on the lives of citizens of the UK, and our work leads to a greater public awareness of what is actually happening or proposed within the EU, then that will be in and of itself a useful contribution to informing democratic debate and decision making.

The recommendations made in the Report are summarised in Chapter 5.
EU Legislation—Public Awareness of the Scrutiny Role of the House of Lords

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

The “Period of Reflection”

1. At the European Council in June 2005 European Union Member States adopted a Declaration on the EU Constitutional Treaty following the “No” votes in France and the Netherlands. The Declaration called for a “period of reflection”, during which time Member States were to take stock of these votes and initiate debate on the future of Europe. Heads of State and Government gave guidance to the Member States on the type of debate that could be organised: “the period of reflection will be used to enable a broad debate to take place in each of our countries, involving citizens, civil society, social partners, national parliaments and political parties”1.

What did we hope to achieve through this inquiry?

2. As a contribution to the period of reflection, this Report2 examines the ways in which a number of national parliaments deal with European affairs, including those which have set up information centres and forums to make information on the European Union available to their citizens.

3. The work of our Committee is based on scrutiny, analysis and, where appropriate, challenge. There is no question of our core function changing. We do not seek to make a case for the setting up of any new information centre. Our inquiry aimed to explore the ways in which our Committee might, both inside and outside the House, better communicate the work that it undertakes in holding Ministers and the EU to account in fulfilment of our mandate, which is “To consider European Union documents and other matters relating to the EU”3.

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2 References in this Report in the text (Q 00) and (p 00) are to the oral and written evidence printed with this Report. A list of witnesses appears in Appendix 5 and a list of our recent Reports is given in Appendix 6. Members’ declared interests are available at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg.htm
3 http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/EU%20ToR.doc
BOX 1

The Scope of our Mandate

- Paragraph 13 of our *Review of Scrutiny of European Legislation* sets out our interpretation of the scope of our mandate:
  - “Scrutiny should include:
    - The accumulation, presentation and summary of relevant material, including information, statistics, explanation and analysis.
    - The provision of information to the House and to the public as a contribution to transparency.
    - Drawing the attention of the House, the Government, European institutions and the public to significant matters contained within that information and in particular making recommendations – “focusing the debate”.
    - Contributing to the law-making process by detailed analysis of draft texts, by exposing difficulties and proposing amendments.
    - An examination of the Government and its role in agreeing European legislation and, as part of that process, compelling the Government not only to think through what it is doing or has done but sometimes to account for it.
    - An examination of the Commission and the policies it formulates.”

4. The inquiry also considered the commonly held belief that “not enough people are aware of the work the Committee is doing…it is a two way relationship: ensuring that people are not only aware of what it is doing but are having some input, and that…the Committee itself is far more proactive in disseminating information about what it is doing…” (Q 43). We aimed to explore the question of whether or not we should be more proactive in communicating our work and inviting wider input into it, and, if appropriate once that question had been answered, to find new ways of promoting and publicising our work, both within the House and amongst the wider public.

5. In conducting this inquiry we were in no way seeking to disseminate propaganda on behalf of the European Union. It is clear that where in the course of our scrutiny work we may recommend, endorse or criticise Government support for a particular EU initiative, this may not go unnoticed in the public domain. If our own scrutiny of the activities of the EU leads to a greater public awareness of what is actually happening or proposed within the EU that will be a useful contribution to informing democratic debate and decision making.

6. We recognise the crucial distinction between seeking to promote our work and seeking to promote the work of others. Lord Norton of Louth drew this distinction clearly: “there are two roles: are you disseminating material on behalf of another body, which is the agency role, or are you disseminating details of what you yourself are doing as a Committee? The latter role, I think, is entirely appropriate” (Q 43). We were not seeking an agency role for ourselves in conducting this inquiry—we are looking for new ways to promote our work, not that of the EU. Lord Williamson of Horton made the

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4 1st Report, Session 2002-03, HL Paper 15
point that looking for new ways to promote our work is “not propaganda, it is getting a good reaction to sensible proposals, sensible material” (Q 53); we can only agree.

7. It was also taken as a given from the outset of this inquiry that the Committee’s work should not be “dumbed down” and that resources should not be diverted away from the core scrutiny work of the Committee or from other Committees in the House. This inquiry aimed to promote the work we already do, not drastically to change the nature of that work.

8. Finally, if we are to be more proactive in reaching out to the public this cannot come at the expense of reporting to the House itself. We always report to the House in the first instance and our primary focus will continue to be the House. It is our belief, however, that there is scope to reach out more to the wider public whilst providing a full service to the House.

Communication and the House of Lords—the wider context

9. This inquiry is topical in that the EU institutions and a number of Member States’ national parliaments are currently looking into how they communicate with citizens, both in reacting to their comments and queries and in actively promoting their work and seeking the public’s input into it.

10. This is true of the United Kingdom. On 24 May 2005 the Hansard Society Commission reported on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy in Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye. The Commission, chaired by Lord Puttnam, believed that Parliament should be a voice for the people and that “The public have a right to expect a Parliament which communicates its work promptly, clearly and usefully, which reaches out to all citizens and which invites participation and interaction”. The Commission concluded that Parliament was failing the public in this right and recommended that Parliament would have to overhaul its current communications structure and radically improve its website.

11. Our inquiry clearly has parallels to that inquiry. We examine whom we are looking to invite to participate more fully in, and interact with, our work and how we might communicate our work more “promptly, clearly and usefully”.

12. Our inquiry also comes at a time when the EU institutions are looking closely at their communications policy during a period of uncertainty in Europe.

Communication Initiatives in Europe

Why are the EU Institutions currently taking such an interest in Communication across Europe?

13. The EU Commission’s Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate (“Plan D”) cites a Eurobarometer survey which shows that public approval of the

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5 http://www.hansardsoctv.org.uk/programmes/putnam_commission
6 p.viii
7 Members Only?, Executive Summary, p. viii
European Union is in steady decline. All the indicators have fallen, in terms of trust, image and assessment of EU membership.

14. The survey shows that 53% of European citizens do not believe that their voice counts in the EU. The Commission believes it is important “to ensure that representative democracy continues to maintain the trust and involvement of Europe’s citizens”\(^{10}\) and it has therefore been looking for ways to “reach out” to citizens and encourage better communication and cooperation across the Union.

Communication with National Parliaments

15. In August 2004 Jose Manuel Barroso created the post of Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communications—currently held by Margot Wallström. This post was created in order to improve the way the Commission communicated with the other EU institutions and the parliaments of Member States and, more generally, the way in which it communicated “Europe” to its citizens.

The Commission’s Action Plan and Plan D

16. Plan D builds on groundwork laid by the Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission\(^{11}\). In the Action plan the Commission listed the various specific measures it would take to improve its communication with Europe’s citizens. These included: reinforcing the Commission representation offices, better internal co-ordination and forward planning, more effective use of language and better presentation of initiatives.

17. As already noted in paragraph 1 of this report, the European Council’s Declaration envisaged a role for the EU institutions in helping to take forward national debates about the future of Europe held at Member State level. The Commission’s Plan D aimed to define that role, both during the period of reflection and beyond. The plan was not written with the aim of reviving the Constitutional Treaty but rather sought to stimulate a wider debate on European issues between the institutions of the EU and European citizens.

18. Amongst Plan D’s recommendations was the suggestion that a series of visits should be made by Commissioners to Member States to promote direct contact between the institutions and the public. Paragraph 4.1.2 states that “individual Commissioners will strive to be accessible and prepared to assist national parliaments to explain Commission policies and provide an overview of recent EU developments”. Commissioner Baroso has since indicated that he will visit all national parliaments during the mandate of the current Commission\(^{12}\). We welcome this commitment by the Commission to be more readily available and we urge them to keep us updated on the steps they are taking to stand by it.

19. Plan D also proposes the setting up of a European Round Table for Democracy, European Citizens’ Panels and the use of UN-style “European

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\(^{10}\) Plan D, p3

\(^{11}\) SEC (2005) 985 – 20/07/2005

Goodwill Ambassadors”. The Commission has subsequently published a further Communication entitled “A Citizen’s Agenda: Delivering Results for Europe”13.

**Where do National Parliaments fit into Plan D?**

20. *Plan D* stipulates that “The primary responsibility for responding to the call for a period of reflection rests with Member States”14. The plan calls on Member States to deliver on their commitments to undertake wide ranging national debates on the future of Europe.

21. In addition *Plan D* suggests that national parliaments might consider:

- Improving their scrutiny function where necessary;
- Working closely with the European Commission to enable the targets set for the Commission’s relations with national parliaments to be met15;
- Attending a forum, to be held in Brussels, to discuss the National Parliaments’ contributions to the period of reflection.

22. The Commission asked the governments of Member States to submit a report on the progress of their national debates by April 2006.

**White Paper on a European Communication Strategy**

23. The Commission has also produced a White Paper on a European Communications Strategy16. The White Paper builds on both the Commission’s *Action Plan* and *Plan D*. It proposes a way forward and invites views on how best to improve the communication of EU issues across Europe.

24. The White Paper outlines five main areas in which action should be taken by the EU institutions in partnership with Member States and civil society:

- Defining the common principles of an EU communications policy (possibly in the form of a framework document or charter);
- Development of tools and facilities for improving public access to information on the EU and for improving public consultation on EU matters;
- More effective involvement of the media and more effective use of new technologies in communicating EU issues;
- Improvement of measures to gauge public opinion;
- Greater engagement of Member States, EU Institutions and civil society on these issues.

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14 p 4

15 These targets revolve around three main themes: mutual service, concrete networking and connecting with people and their elected representatives. They include a range of actions from high level participation in the Conference of European Affairs Committees (COSAC) to facilitating the electronic exchange of EU-related information between the National Parliaments.

What are other national parliaments doing as regards communicating with their citizens on European issues?

25. The national parliaments of the EU Member States handle European affairs in different ways. The United Kingdom handles European affairs through its scrutiny committees in the House of Commons and House of Lords which operate with maximum transparency. In some other national parliaments there is a system for mandating Ministers. Some, as explained below, have set up EU information centres or Forums (in addition to scrutiny committees in some cases), to make information on European affairs available to citizens.

**Swedish/Danish/Latvian EU Information Centres**

26. Sweden, Denmark and Latvia all have EU information centres attached to their national parliaments which aim to offer impartial information on EU issues to any interested citizen.

27. We took oral evidence from both the Swedish Parliament’s European Affairs Committee and the Danish Parliament’s EU Committee on the work of the EU information centres attached to their parliaments. We asked how the centres worked in practice and how they were viewed by citizens. Both the Swedish and Danish Committee Members said that they felt the centres were viewed as impartial politically and as a good source of objective information.

28. The EU information centre in Denmark was set up by the Folketing after the first Danish ‘no vote’ in 1992 on the Maastricht Treaty, because Danish parliamentarians recognised there was a need for “solid, neutral information...give a better understanding of the mechanisms of the European Union” (Q 6). The information dispensed by the Centre aims to be both objective and impartial and the Centre is both reactive in responding to enquiries received over the telephone and by e-mail and proactive in producing printed information for wide dissemination. The centre produces a booklet called *117 Questions About the EU* which covers “the most common questions asked by everybody who approaches the information office” (Q 6). The booklet has been translated into all the official languages of the EU “because it has been picked up by other Member States” (Q 6).

29. Although the Swedish EU Information Centre is part of the Riksdag Administration it aims to be neither biased nor political. Indeed the Swedish parliamentarians we spoke to claimed that linking the Centre to the parliament had “proved to be a good idea because it is looked upon as more impartial, rather than if it was under the government itself” (Q 34). Mr Lindblad MP, whilst accepting that it is the person who receives the information who decides whether it is impartial or not, said that he did “not think the population see it [the information dispensed by the Centre] as propaganda” (Q 37).

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17 See Qs 1 and 18 of the oral evidence we took from the Swedish and Danish European Affairs Committee and paragraphs 68-70 of our Review of Scrutiny of European Legislation

18 Published here on pages 1 to 18.


20 The Danish Parliament


22 The Swedish Parliament
30. Latvia set up its EU information centre\(^\text{23}\) in November 1997 under the auspices of the Saeima\(^\text{24}\) European Affairs Committee. The objectives and tasks of the centre are set out in an internal parliament document entitled *The Regulation of the EU Information Centre*\(^\text{25}\). This document was approved by the Presidium of the Saeima. The regulations state that the Centre is to provide the Saeima and the general public with impartial, factual information about European affairs and the implications of Latvia’s membership of the EU. The Centre employs non-political staff and has a budget separate from that of the European Affairs Committee. The Centre prepares weekly bulletins on EU issues, maintains its multifunctional webpage and operates a phone enquiry service.

**Ireland’s National Forum on Europe**

31. Ireland’s National Forum on Europe\(^\text{26}\) was set up in 2001 with the aim of facilitating discussion on Ireland’s membership of the EU. The Forum is made up of Members of the Irish Parliament (the Oireachtas) and those the political parties of the Oireachtas nominate. Speaking rights at the Forum are also given to a Special Observer Pillar comprising representatives of civil society and Special Partners\(^\text{27}\).

32. The Chairman of the Forum is independent Senator Maurice Hayes who is responsible for management of the Forum’s business along with a Steering Committee and an independent Secretariat.

33. To date the Forum has held 59 plenary meetings, 36 regional meetings and 6 national conferences and has produced 5 consensus reports. In addition the Forum has produced a range of information materials which are designed to stimulate debate on EU issues across Ireland.

34. The Forum has found that since the “No” votes in France and the Netherlands and the decision to postpone Ireland’s referendum on the Treaty (originally expected in Autumn 2005) it has been “a challenge to get members of the public to attend meetings”. The Forum has responded to this challenge by seeking partnerships with its observer pillar organisations and by tailoring its debates “to the specific concerns of these organisations” (p 60).

**Recommendation**

35. **We make this Report to the House for Debate.**

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\(^{24}\) The Latvian Parliament
\(^{25}\) This document was circulated to the Committee and is available from the House of Lords Record Office.
\(^{26}\) [http://www.forumoneurope.ie/](http://www.forumoneurope.ie/)
\(^{27}\) The Special Observer Pillar includes representatives of the trade union movement, of employers’ and farmers’ organisations as well as of voluntary and community organisations. It also contains political parties represented only at local level, some parties from Northern Ireland, representatives of the main Christian churches and bodies of religious minorities, and campaigning groups on both sides of the EU debate.
CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR A GREATER FOCUS ON PUBLIC AWARENESS

BOX 2

The Work of the EU Select Committee

The House of Lords 19-member Select Committee on the European Union has a broad mandate to consider European Union documents and other matters relating to the European Union. Like our sister European Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons, we operate under the terms of a Scrutiny Reserve Resolution, passed by the House, which is intended to ensure that Ministers do not agree to EU legislation in Council unless the scrutiny process is completed. Ministers can override the Reserve, but must give an explanation, which is published, when they do so.

Some 1150 documents are deposited in Parliament by the Government each year, each accompanied by an Explanatory Memorandum prepared by the relevant Department, setting out the Government’s view on a number of key areas, including the policy implications of the proposal and the timetable for its consideration in the Council. On the Monday of each week when the House is sitting—and as necessary during Recesses—the Chairman of the Select Committee conducts a first sift of the documents deposited in the previous week, examining each one with its Explanatory Memorandum, and, drawing on the advice of the Clerks and the Legal Adviser, decides whether it should be referred to one or more of the seven Sub-Committees for examination or cleared from scrutiny. Around one in three documents are sent to a Sub-Committee. Each of these Sub-Committees is responsible for a particular set of related policy areas in which its ten or so members have a particular expertise.

A Sub-Committee may clear a document from scrutiny after noting its contents and, if it so wishes, expressing views in writing to the relevant Minister. Alternatively a Sub-Committee may retain a document under scrutiny during exchanges of correspondence with the Minister until satisfied and prepared to clear the document. All such correspondence is published and significant items are on the website. The Sub-Committee may decide to instigate a formal inquiry into a document and call for public evidence. The resulting report, which goes to the Select Committee for approval, may later be debated in the House.

The Select Committee may also initiate inquiries of its own – about three a year – and also takes evidence from each incoming Presidency’s Ambassador and from the Minister for Europe after each major European Council. Unlike the practice followed in some national parliaments, such as Denmark’s Folketing, Ministers do not have to secure a mandate from Parliament before negotiating a position in Council. The Select Committee also attaches much importance to an examination of the Commission’s Annual Work Programme.

36. It was against the background of what other national parliaments are doing that we decided to look at the contribution our parliament makes.
The case for better publicising the work of the Committee and drawing it to the attention of the right people

37. In the course of this inquiry, before considering the question of what we might do to better promote our work, we explored the question of why we want better publicity for our work and who we want to publicise it to. These questions are considered in this Chapter.

38. We believe it is important that the public knows about the work we are doing, under the scrutiny reserve, in their name. We are the recipients of public money and we work, under the authority of the House, in the interests of the public. It is therefore part of our duty to try to make it clear to as wide a public as possible what we are doing and why we are reaching the conclusions that we are.

39. Currently we seek evidence for our reports from expert witnesses and, whilst we put out a general Call for Evidence on our website for each inquiry, submissions from members of the general public, as opposed to specialist or lobby groups, are rarely forthcoming. Completed reports are sent directly to expert witnesses and interested public bodies and NGOs but, although freely available on our website, are generally not promoted to the wider public.

40. More can always be done to ensure that our Calls for Evidence are better publicised and reach a wide group of people and to ensure that our reports are promoted to the public at large and not just to already interested groups and expert witnesses.

41. If the public is to become better informed about our work it is essential that we interact effectively with the media and secure the best press coverage we can for our work. This is desirable in two regards: firstly increased press coverage will raise our profile and ensure our work reaches a larger and more diverse audience. Secondly if our profile is raised through the media our reports may exert more influence over policy makers.

42. Michael White, Political Editor of The Guardian, explained how this might come about “Your role, it seems to us, and our role in reporting your work is to raise questions about the public sphere and the public good, public policy, its direction, its quality, the way in which decisions are made, and by flagging them up, even in a crude way...then you are drawing the attention of the public and of officials...and of politicians who always say, ‘Damn, that story has begun to run, we will have to do something’ ” (Q 73).

43. Securing better publicity for our work may help us to better fulfil our core scrutiny function. Securing better publicity for our work might also help to raise the profile of the House itself and to restore public confidence in the role of parliament. If the Committee describes well and effectively the work we are doing, we will, in the end, have an effect on the public because we will show that Parliament is holding the Government to account properly and is being properly informed.

Why can’t we adopt initiatives similar to other national parliaments?

44. One of the initial purposes of this inquiry was to examine the work of other national parliaments which have set up EU information centres and forums. However, there can be no question of this Committee seeking to set up any such centre or forum for both constitutional and practical reasons.
45. Lord Norton of Louth set out the constitutional reasons against us setting up such an initiative. He said that it should be remembered that the Committee fulfils the functions that the House assigns to it: it is not an agent of anybody outside the United Kingdom Parliament. Therefore, “If it were to take on a task which might be seen as an agency role on behalf of some other body that would be constitutionally inappropriate” (Q 42).

46. We agree that there is no case for us to take on any form of agency role for any body outside the UK Parliament nor should we take on any additional role that might compromise the scrutiny role given to us by the House. Moreover, as the Committee is an agent of the House, it would of course be for the House itself to take any such decision.

47. In addition to the constitutional argument there are also practical reasons as to why our Committee could not establish an information centre or forum.

48. The Committee should provide “value added”—it should not be merely a conduit for information emanating from outside of itself. As Lord Norton noted, “I think there has to be some value-added element provided by the Committee which is then disseminated rather than being merely a conduit for information which presently exists” (Q 44). We recognise that in making our reports we are informing the public on European policy but our role is not simply to make that policy information available, but to analyse and comment on it.

49. Furthermore, the European Union Institutions already have mechanisms in place for publicising their policies: “The EU has the means in place for disseminating material about its work and there is no obvious reason why that work should be duplicated by national parliaments” (Lord Norton of Louth, p 68). Both the European Parliament and the European Commission have Offices in London which are tasked with promoting and publicising their work28.

50. In addition, the UK Government is going to support the “Europe Direct” programme of information centres and call centres. The Government told us; “We support the Commission’s plan to open Europe Direct public information centres across the UK. The Commission has a legitimate role in providing information about the European Union to the public. We are working closely with the Commission to ensure the success of this service in the UK”29. At present UK citizens can telephone the Europe Direct information line which is based in Brussels and run by the European Commission30. According to information published by the Commission the service handled 112,000 queries in 2005, 12,004 of these were from UK citizens. The Europe Direct centres will meet the need for a European information service in the UK—there is no need for an additional service. It is right that the Government support such a service as it is they who help make and sign up to European policies and they should explain those policies to the British public. The recent Commission White Paper emphasises this responsibility “It is the responsibility of government, at national, regional and local level, to consult and inform citizens about public

29 Written evidence, submitted by Douglas Alexander MP, p 44. 
30 Further information on the service can be found at: www.europe.eu.int/europedirect
policy—including European policies and their impact on people’s daily lives”.

51. The Government also launched a new “Britain in the EU” section on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website on 13 April 2006. The Government believes that the new site “will be both a valuable resource on UK EU policy and the debate on the future direction of the EU”.

52. The UK Electoral Commission are also mandated to promote public awareness of the function and policies of the EU Institutions. Section 13 (c) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 states that the UK Electoral Commission; “shall promote public awareness of…the institutions of the European Union”.

53. The task of presenting and explaining the EU and its policies falls to the EU Institutions themselves. National governments make EU legislation collectively in the Council of Ministers, co-legislating with the European Parliament. National governments are directly accountable to their citizens. It is for national governments to explain and present the positions they take in the Council, and the decisions the Council collectively reaches. Greater transparency in the procedures of the Council is accordingly essential. Our job is to add value to the legislative process through scrutiny and analysis and to do so in as transparent a way as possible. We therefore welcome the launch of the Government’s new website and their commitment to support the Europe Direct information centres. We urge the Government to keep us fully informed of their initiatives in this area to ensure they are properly scrutinised.

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31 p 5
32 The site can be found at www.europe.gov.uk
34 http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/
35 Chapter 41.
CHAPTER 3: WHAT NEEDS DID OUR EVIDENCE PINPOINT?

54. Whilst the evidence we received was diverse in terms of specific suggestions for how we might improve our work in general and our connection with the public in particular, many of our witnesses pointed to three specific areas in which our work could be enhanced or in which we should change our attitude towards disseminating and promoting our work. This Chapter gives an overview of these three areas—Chapter 4 explores them in more depth.

More debate on EU issues in national parliaments would be desirable

55. On a general level, many of our witnesses agreed that more debate in national parliaments36 on European Union issues would be “very desirable”37 and that our Committee might be well placed to encourage and support such debate. Securing more debate time for European Union issues in national parliaments might help to guarantee more press coverage of European affairs and consequently make the EU decision making process more transparent to citizens.

56. The Welsh National Assembly argued that “Scrutiny of EU issues within national parliaments and in regional parliaments and assemblies brings greater transparency to the EU decision-making process” (p 65).

57. Dermott Scott38 warned that “If EU matters are largely neglected by the political class they will tend to be ignored by the media” and suggested that “Raising the level of understanding of specific EU matters in the Palace of Westminster would undoubtedly raise the level of debate and might consequently trickle down into… public interest” (p 75).

58. We agree that more debate on EU issues in national parliaments is desirable. We have long argued and continue to believe that more debate time for European affairs should be made available in the House of Lords for debates on our own reports and wider European issues.

Our work is appreciated in select circles but not widely known

59. Several of our witnesses commented that our work, whilst respected in select circles, was not widely known. The European Movement said that “The House of Lords European Union Committee produces outstanding reports on EU legislation but these tend to be unknown to the public at large” (p 67); the Brethren in Britain agreed that “the excellent work of the Lords EU Committees and the Commons Scrutiny Committees is very little known” (p 46). Brendan Donnelly of the Federal Trust noted that whilst our “impact on the approaches of political elites to European questions, in this country and elsewhere, is relatively high” our “impact on the broader public debate is noticeably less pronounced” (p 50). There is a sense in which we are often reaching only the “already interested” groups. As Lord Norton noted “The challenge for Parliament is to ensure that the impact of committees extends beyond the “usual suspects” (p 68).

36 Including in devolved administrations, such as the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh National Assembly
37 Brethren in Britain written evidence, p 45.
38 Director of the UK Office of the European Parliament. Mr Scott submitted written evidence in a personal capacity.
60. Lord Norton gives two reasons why we should reach out to a more diverse audience: “greater interaction with members of the public is desirable and worth pursuing. It is important at two levels. One is in ensuring that people are better informed about the work of the House in its scrutiny of the EU...The second level is in ensuring that people are more aware of what is happening in the EU and are able to contribute to debate” (p 68).

61. **Although we appreciate that our work is often dense and document-focused and, for that reason, will always interest specialised groups in particular, we nevertheless think that greater interaction with the public at large is a goal worth pursuing.**

**Our website needs to be improved**

**BOX 3**

**Accessing our website**

Our website can be accessed through the UK Parliament webpages. Users should first visit the UK Parliament’s webpage at: [http://www.parliament.uk/](http://www.parliament.uk/). From there, users should go to the Lords homepage (signposted off the Parliament homepage), then to the “Committees” Homepage and finally to the homepage of the “EU Select Committee”\(^\text{39}\).

Visitors to our website will find links to pages containing information on the Committee’s past, current and forthcoming inquiries, links to the Committee’s published evidence sessions, Reports and Correspondence with ministers, pages containing information about forthcoming meetings of the Committee, information on Members of the Committee and contact details for Committee staff.

62. Almost all of our witnesses felt that whilst our website contained much useful information it is extremely hard for people to navigate and access the information they require.

63. There was a strong feeling that an improved website could dramatically enhance our connection with the public: “The best means of communicating with the public is electronically. A straight-forward, jargon-free, easily navigable website is how the Committee’s work can be followed by “the public” and, at the same time, is the means by which “the public” can best make its views known to the Committee” (European Movement, p 67); and that, currently, we aren’t making full use of our site: “The Lords should certainly make greater use of its own website, disseminating its own reports and evaluations and indeed in placing the government’s explanatory memoranda on EU legislation on the net” (Richard Corbett MEP, p 48).

64. Specifically witnesses felt that the website should be better presented, easier to use and, to the greatest possible extent, free of technical jargon. The Welsh National Assembly thinks that the website should include “more visual elements and clear explanations of European jargon” as “The complicated language surrounding European legislation (and the House of Lords’ scrutiny of it) is divorced from the reality of the people whose lives it affects” (p 66).

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\(^{39}\) [http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/lords_eu_select_committee.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/lords_eu_select_committee.cfm)
65. Lord Norton thought that it was essential for our website to take “into account policy areas” because “Individuals who are not knowledgeable about Parliament but interested in a particular policy sector may have difficulty locating any inquiry of interest to them” (p 69). This would mean that if someone typed “The Common Agricultural Policy” into the site, the site would automatically retrieve and present any information, reports, correspondence with ministers, relating to that topic.

66. **We agree that our website is in need of a re-design to make it easier to use. We fully support initiatives currently underway to deliver this re-design and we make recommendations on the form of this re-design in Chapter 4.**
CHAPTER 4: WHAT INITIATIVES CAN WE INTRODUCE TO MEET THOSE NEEDS?

Website re-design

67. The strategic aims of the Parliament website are:
   - To make information on Parliament’s work easily available to all users;
   - To promote the work of Parliament; and
   - To provide appropriate tools to allow Parliament the opportunity to listen to those who wish to communicate with members or with the administration.

68. It is clear from our evidence that our current website does not deliver on all these aims and also that a re-designed, easier to navigate website could have a real impact on the reach and impact of our work.

69. As it stands our website has numerous strengths which should not be lost in any re-design. Firstly, our website combines serious factual and analytical content with comprehensive availability of material. Secondly, all the material available on our website is free to view and to print. Lastly, the website has a limitless capacity and allows Committee staff to write and update the page content themselves within a framework template.

70. However, it has been widely noticed that our website is only really of assistance to those who know what they are looking for and have the time to search the site thoroughly in order to find it: “the website is extremely useful but it is also passive” (Q 53)—information on our work is not being made easily available to all users.

71. Several of our witnesses suggested that it would be helpful if material on our website was accessible more by topic area than by Sub-Committee, so that a user would be able to find all material relating to a particular policy area quickly. In addition to this Michael White also suggested that it would be helpful if the Committee’s website was linked to popular search engines to enable people interested in a policy area to be drawn to the Committee’s website without previously knowing of its existence, “one of the things I want to suggest to you is that active steps should be taken to get links...so that when someone types into the magic Google machine [a European policy area] at some point it will bring up the link to your report” (Q 75).

72. We welcome the proposed redesign of the website in accordance with the core task of the House’s administration “to make the House and its work accessible to the public.” We note that Parliament’s Internet Strategy identifies at least three different audiences for parliament’s website including:
   - Citizens in general;
   - Specialist users (including Members and staff of both Houses, academics opinion formers and other informed users); and
   - Children in school (up to 18) and their teachers, requiring primarily educational material.

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40 See Appendix 4 for Parliament’s Internet Strategy
73. We welcome proposals to make information more easily accessible to all users, with logical and consistent navigation and access, deliverable via a range of devices (such as Smartphones\(^\text{42}\) and PDAs as well as PCs). We also note that a proposal will be considered to allow the piloting of interactive tools on the website to allow increased direct interaction between individual citizens and individual members of both Houses.

74. **We support, as a principal purpose of the re-design, the aim of improving the users’ ease of navigation of the website.** Pages should be clearly signposted by topic area and forewords to and summaries of reports should be easily accessible. The possibility of linking the Committee’s website with popular internet search engines could be explored, to allow those unfamiliar with the work of the Committee to notice its reports on particular policy areas.

**Explanatory Memoranda**

75. There was a widespread feeling amongst our witnesses that Government Explanatory Memoranda should be made publicly available on our website. These are public documents but as the City Remembrancer has noticed few would “know of their existence or how to obtain them”, and therefore creating “a central depositary of these EMs accessible by the wider public” (p 51) would be a useful endeavour. Lord Norton of Louth believes that “Committees can exploit new ways of engaging with the public and eliciting the views of the public. Ensuring that the Explanatory Memoranda on EU documents are made publicly available on the internet will…contribute to this process” (p 69) and Baroness Williams of Crosby agreed with this view: “I agree with Lord Norton very strongly about explanatory memoranda being on the website; I think that is absolutely crucial because a lot of Directives are very hard for lay people to understand” (Q 46).

76. **We have previously recommended, and here re-affirm our recommendation, that all Government Explanatory Memoranda be made available free of charge to any interested parties on a dedicated Government website\(^\text{43}\).**

77. The City Remembrancer thinks that as well as making EMs available on our website there “is also scope for further development of the Parliamentary website to put the inquirer on notice of what the European Committees in both houses intend to consider in forthcoming meetings”. They go on to say that they “appreciate that this information is already largely provided on the Committees’ own websites but, to the less informed, it is unlikely to be discovered easily” (p 51). **We agree and recommend that on the re-designed website Committees should continue to post future meetings dates and should also list under these dates the main agenda items for each meeting as far in advance as they are able to do so.**

78. A re-designed website could also potentially include more interactive tools, for example forums and other opportunities for e-consultation. Lord Norton of Louth would welcome the introduction of more interactive tools to the website and believes that “Even a simple click-button interactive facility allowing users to let the committee know they would welcome copies of

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\(^{42}\) A smartphone is any electronic handheld device that integrates the functionality of a mobile phone, personal digital assistant (PDA) or other information appliance.

executive summaries or reports would be a step forward” (p 69). Michael White pointed out that “the degree of interactivity” (Q 75) which can be generated by such tools can generate an extensive “cross-fertilisation” (Q 75) of information. For example, a member of the public discussing nuclear waste in an interactive forum on the Guardian’s website might be fed a link to one of our Committee Reports by another participant (“forumite”): if we want our work to be more widely noticed we must actively engage with online communities in which the policy areas we scrutinise are discussed.

79. As far as new tools are concerned, the Committee would be willing to assist in the piloting of new ways of using the website to promote our work. We have recently experimented with a web forum – in January 2006 our Environment and Agriculture Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee D) launched a forum as part of its inquiry into the safety of nuclear installations and the management of nuclear waste within the EU. A website was set up which could be accessed through the Sub-Committee’s main webpage. The general public were invited to inform the Sub-Committee of their views on nuclear waste and safety by emailing them to the Sub-Committee via the webpage. The webforum remained active for two months and proved a useful tool for the Sub-Committee in collating the views of the general public44.

80. For the future the Committee’s priority would be to support new ways of effectively disseminating the results of our existing scrutiny work, such as reports and correspondence with ministers. Hence we can see value in on-line web discussions between Committee Members and web users a short while after publication of a report; or making abstracts of reports or press releases available in new ways, such as via podcast45 or direct to Smartphones or PDAs. An audio/visual presentation on the work of the Committee might also be of interest, perhaps to schools. Other possible initiatives such as allowing yes or no voting on a simple question would seem to be of less value in the context of our work.

A new approach to press and publicity

81. It seems clear from the evidence we have received that our approach to press and publicity is not focused or proactive enough to ensure a reasonable amount of press coverage of our work.

82. We appreciate that Parliament as a whole gets less media coverage than it used to, as Michael White noted “it is difficult for us as political journalists to get things into the newspaper which we would have got in more easily ten years ago, or five years ago…it arises from a marketisation of news, and what is deemed to be important is much more varied” (Q 60). As Members of the unelected Upper House we can expect to encounter further difficulties in getting our work into the public domain. Nevertheless we believe that if we alter our press and publicity strategy it will be possible for us to secure better media coverage of our work. Such coverage would be desirable for the reasons outlined in Chapter 2 of this Report.

44 For more information on the webforum experiment please see Appendix 3.

45 Podcasting is the method of distributing multimedia files, such as audio programs or music videos, over the internet for playback on mobile devices and personal computers.
Why is our work not getting more coverage in the media?

83. Many of our witnesses suggest two main reasons—we are not promoting our work well and we are attempting to promote it to the wrong people.

84. Our reports are often seen to be strong on content but weak on presentation: “These reports, which you produce, which I sometimes read and still fail to get into the newspaper, can be pretty solid” (Q 66). We agree with Michael White that “one can be serious without being dull” (Q 82). Whilst “dumbing down” the content of our reports would be highly undesirable it should be possible to make their presentation more lively and engaging to the reader through increased use of snappy facts and figures, uncluttered phrasing and the inclusion in each Report, where necessary, of a technical terms glossary. In addition full use should be made of the title of a Report and its foreword to capture the essence of each report and catch the reader’s attention.

85. Members and Committee staff need to be more proactive in seeking out media attention. Journalists can, and should, be contacted directly and given guidance on the content of a Report and the pages most relevant to any potential article. As Michael White pointed out, when a journalist working under a deadline is presented with a hefty Committee report “a nudge of the elbow saying pages 77 to 84” can be extremely helpful (Q 66). Lobby correspondents can be contacted and informed of work a particular Member or Committee is undertaking: “For regional lobby correspondents, of whom there are probably about 30 working in the press gallery, they will always be grateful for a simple call to say did you know that I was doing this last night, or that I said this last night, or I am going to say this tonight” (John Hipwood, Q 86).

86. If we are to present our reports effectively we need to put faces to them—media attention for reports can more easily be secured if Members are willing to engage with the press and present their work: “If you have a strong voice, someone who is media-friendly, who can go onto radio and TV and put the line, then that is a very useful starting-off point to get your reports into the media” (John Hipwood, Q 64). The timing of publication needs to be carefully managed too.

87. It is crucial that we direct our efforts to secure more media attention to the right people and many of our witnesses suggested that rather than focusing our efforts on the national press we should be looking to engage the regional and specialised press.

88. Lord Williamson of Horton said that “You are going to get a public...though you are not necessarily going to get the public that reads the daily press published in London, you can get a lot more information into the regional press than you will get into the London press” (Q 56). Jon Hipwood agreed that the regional press would be more likely to run with a story on a Committee Report and suggested that, on occasion, we alter the times we embargo our Reports until to suit the evening press: “an 11 o’clock embargo would suit because it would catch all the evening newspapers, which in fact outsell the morning papers in any particular area across the board” (Q 65). We might also find more favour with the regional press if we were to hold press briefings away from London sometimes and take more evidence away from Westminster: “it would be very helpful if the EU Select Committee
could hold its hearings... in the various UK nations and regions, [and] not just in Westminster” (European Movement, p 67).

89. As well as more involvement with the regional press we should be seeking to engage more with the specialised press and with journalists whose areas of interest co-incide with the content of different Sub-Committee’s Reports. As Baroness Williams of Crosby notes, certain committees will appeal to different sectors of the press, “in the case of the agriculture and environment committee then there is a strong interest in the farming press which might not be reflected in the general press” (Q 46). Michael White agreed saying that we should alter our press and publicity strategy to suit each report, deciding whether the topic it explores is primarily political or primarily specialist: “you decide what is best, is this story primarily political or primarily one for a specialist” (Q 68). If a report would secure more attention from the specialised press our strategy should reflect that: “we should have small press launches, not for the whole of the press,... but more precisely specialised press launches about the work being done by a Committee...in the area of interest to them” (Q 46).

90. We intend to seek to ensure more press coverage of our work from the regional and specialised press. We will ensure that our press and publicity strategy for each report reflects its individual appeal to certain sectors of the press.

**BOX 4**

**An example of a Press and Publicity Strategy—Publicising this Report**

This is a report that will be of interest mainly to specialist journalists covering the EU and those with a particular interest in Parliamentary procedures and in media coverage of the work of Parliament. This is not an issue that has a clear, immediate impact on the public generally and as such is not likely to interest the popular media.

A suitable approach would be to target efforts at publications covering the EU such as European Union Politics and The EU Observer as well as political web-based media such as e-politix and politics.co.uk. There may also be some interest amongst lobby journalists who take a particular interest in Parliamentary procedures including diary columnists and sketch writers. A potential hook to use in promoting the report to journalists would be to put the report and the new communication strategy in the context of opening-up access to the House in general. This fits with the Puttnam agenda and moves such as the introduction of a Speaker in the Lords.

It is also important that a report such as this is read by Government Departments, MPs and Peers. This could be achieved through articles in publications such as The House Magazine and Whitehall and Westminster World as well as sending the report and press release directly to the relevant departments.

**Improving our scrutiny of the Commission Annual Legislative and Work Programme (CWLP)**

91. The majority of our witnesses thought that we should improve our scrutiny of the Commission’s Annual Work Programme by conducting an annual debate in the Chamber of the House. We already produce a short Report on the work programme each year.
92. The purpose of such enhanced scrutiny would be two-fold. Firstly holding a debate would ensure European issues were raised and debated routinely in a systematic way in Parliament. Secondly the Commission has said it will listen to any comments on the Work Programme submitted by national parliaments and, where appropriate adapt its work programme accordingly. “The CWLP is a crucial document in the Commission’s annual programming, and debates on this issue in the national parliaments would help further stimulating their greater responsibility for Europe. Contributions from national parliaments could help the Commission in directing its works before and after the formal presentation of proposals” (Commission Evidence, p 81).

93. Another way of ensuring that the House of Lords debates European issues more regularly would be for the statements on the outcome of each European Council meeting to be supplemented by a meaningful short debate. We recommend that such a debate be held within a week of each such statement.

94. We already produce an annual report on the Commissions’ Work Programme, and each year we seek to improve our scrutiny of it. We recognise, however, that more can be done. We recommend that the House make time for an annual debate on the Commission’s Work Programme to be held in the Chamber of the House.

95. It has been suggested by some that such a debate should be synchronised with the debates on the Annual Work Programme held by other Member States: “There is no reason why debate on the work programme, on the floor of the House, should not be synchronised, as far as possible, between member-states (the influence of national Parliaments would be considerably enhanced by this” (Baroness Williams of Crosby, p 82).

96. This idea was first raised in the document “Raise National European Awareness” which was presented at the Convention on the Future of Europe. The document proposed that a coinciding debate should take place in all the EU national parliaments on the Annual Legislative and Work Programme of the European Commission in the same week as this debate was scheduled in the European Parliament.

97. The idea was debated at the XXXII COSAC, held in the Hague in November 2004. COSAC called on the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments to put “forward a proposal, in consultation with the European parliament, on the specific week in which all the national parliaments will hold a debate on the annual legislative and work programme of the European Commission”.

98. The Conference of Speakers held in Budapest June 2005 called on national parliaments “to hold a debate preferably in plenary session each year on the annual legislative and work programme of the European Commission with due respect for their internal work programme, legal framework and traditions” and asked Denmark, as the incoming presidency of the Conference, to “make the necessary consultations to find an appropriate
timeframe for the implementation of the declaration, and report back to the Conference on the experience with the implementation of the declaration”.

99. On 12 July 2005 the Danish Parliament sent a short questionnaire to all the national parliaments in order to try and find an appropriate timeframe for the implementation of the declaration. After analysing the responses it received from national parliaments, the Danish Parliament consulted the “troika” of the Speakers Conference on 12 October 2005. It was suggested that the first debate be initiated prior to the next meeting of the Speakers Conference in June 2006.

100. We think that it would be desirable for such a synchronised series of debates to take place annually across Europe but we recognise that practically it would be hard to implement this idea and that it would be impossible for a debate to be held in each Member State on the same day.

101. We recommend that debates in Member States be held within a reasonably compact timeframe, perhaps within the same month. We await the outcome of the ongoing consultation on the suggestion and its attempted implementation with interest.

Our Reports

The issues our reports cover

102. There was widespread feeling amongst our witnesses that more of our reports should focus on the big, non-document based European issues than they do at present and that we should be more adventurous in spending more time looking at issues which are not to do with current legislation and more to do with general development of the European project.

103. Whilst we would not want to stop producing detailed, document-based scrutiny reports we recognise that reports on more widely based issues might be more successful in interesting the media and the public at large. We need to find a successful balance between the two categories of report and we agree with Lord Norton that “We do have the resources, between the Select Committee and the Sub-Committees, to ensure there is a balance, so that one is not actually losing out on either side” (Q 49).

104. Currently the Select Committee and its Sub-Committees undertake many wider, cross-cutting reports and the Sub-Committees also undertake much detailed policy work. There is a case for saying that Sub-Committees should conduct more wider, non-document based inquiries on topical European Union issues—“my feeling is that there is a real danger in missing the big canvass by getting very engrossed in the smaller ones and that in some cases it might be appropriate for the main Committee to call upon individual Members from Sub-Committees to look at particular issues of a major kind in greater detail” (Baroness Williams, Q 47). Such reports would raise the profile of the Sub-Committees and engage a wider audience for their work.

105. We recognise that these broader reports might lead to more differences of opinion in Committee but we agree with Baroness Williams that this is not necessarily problematic: “I do not know why the Committee should worry too much about expressing in its reports and even describing, some
differences of opinion within the Committee” (Q 46). Such “differences of opinion” may even serve to make a Report more engaging to its readers.

**The dissemination of our reports**

106. We need to address the problems with the dissemination of our reports both inside the House and beyond. It was widely commented that we should be more proactive in seeking out suitable recipients for our reports and that we should disseminate our reports far beyond the witnesses who provided the evidence and the interested “usual suspects”.

107. To address this problem we need to make our reports more readily available but alongside them we need to make more explanatory material available.

108. **We will investigate with the House authorities means of better distributing our reports in the House. In addition, we will look at ways of making our work more accessible to schools and universities.**

109. **All of our reports already contain a foreword, which gives a flavour of the report, and an outline of key recommendations and conclusions. We will investigate ways of making these sections of our reports more widely available to Members of the House of Lords, journalists and the wider public.**

110. As Lord Norton notes, the needs of Members and the wider public are similar: “the crucial question is how do you make these very thorough, informed, reports, available to Members in a way that excites their interest, where they feel they have the confidence to actually add to what is being said by those who are the experts in the area and have contributed to the report—The sort of material you are putting out, say, to the attentive publics, the summaries and so on, should be made equally available to Members and more widely advertised within the House itself” (Q 52).

**Presenting our reports**

111. Lord Norton also pointed out that “Committees generally appear to think that their work is done once a report is published” (pp 69–70). There is scope for us to increase the impact of our reports by presenting their contents more actively when they are published: “a more vigorous presentation of the results of the Committee’s work...would be advantageous” (Lord Williamson, p 83).

112. Where appropriate Members could arrange to hold seminars with witnesses and the wider public in the weeks following the publication of a Committee Report. Such seminars would give Members an opportunity to discuss the findings of the Report and receive any feedback offered by attendees. On occasion such seminars could be held online.

113. **In addition Sub-Committee Chairs and other interested Members will continue to look for opportunities to promote their Committee Reports to interested groups in Brussels.**

**More proactive Members?**

114. Most of the above initiatives rely on Members being more proactive and it will be for individual Members to decide to what extent they wish to be more proactive in promoting and publicising the work of the Committee. It will
also be for each Sub-Committee ultimately to decide how best to promote and publicise their work; approaches may be different for different reports.

115. If Members are eager to be more proactive there would be scope for the Committee to be more active in raising issues arising from reports and correspondence in the Chamber through tabling starred questions or contributing to debates.

116. Each Sub-Committee could, if Members are supportive of the idea, spend five minutes at each Committee meeting looking ahead to the scheduled business of the Chamber with a view to identifying opportunities to make the work of the Committee known to the House.

117. In addition, the Chairman of the Select Committee could brief political party meetings and crossbench meetings annually on the work of the Committee. It might also be possible to make more information available through the all party notices.

**Reaching out—educational initiatives**

118. The Committee could do much more to engage students with its work and could implement both reactive and proactive initiatives to promote such engagement. Such initiatives would not be designed to promote the work of the European Union to a captive audience but would rather be effective in explaining the work of this Committee and how it fits into the EU legislative process.

119. In terms of reactive initiatives the Committee could, resources allowing, respond positively to requests from schools and universities for seminars/talks with Committee Members or Committee staff.48

120. In terms of proactive initiatives the Committee could organise an annual sixth form conference on European issues as suggested by Baroness Williams: “I would propose an annual sixth form conference on European issues linked into the new curriculum subject of citizenship” (p 83). We could also take up another of Baroness Williams’ suggestions and produce case studies on the way European legislation is made and the role of the Committee in that legislative process. Such case studies could be made available to schools and universities through their libraries and politics teachers/lecturers. As Baroness Williams stressed “A case study can be highly objective” and “does not need to be in any way propagandistic” (Q 46).

121. The Committee could also make an effort to capture the attention of students visiting the Palace of Westminster on school visits by setting up exhibitions of our work in an appropriate venue on the parliamentary estate and providing written material explaining its current work.

122. **The above paragraphs on being more proactive and on educational initiatives make suggestions for how we, our Sub-Committees and individual Committee Members, might go about promoting our work within the House and beyond. These suggestions will be considered by us and our Sub-Committees and acted on where appropriate**49.

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48 This is occasionally done at present. For example, on the afternoon of 13 June 2006 several Committee Members will be meeting for a seminar with students from the Queen Elizabeth School, Barnet.

49 The Committee will have regard to recent initiatives of the Hansard Society and to those of the UN in promoting “model UN” activities in schools.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication Initiatives in Europe

123. Amongst Plan D’s recommendations was the suggestion that a series of visits should be made by Commissioners to Member States to promote direct contact between the institutions and the public. Paragraph 4.1.2 states that “individual Commissioners will strive to be accessible and prepared to assist national parliaments to explain Commission policies and provide an overview of recent EU developments”. Commissioner Baroso has since indicated that he will visit all national parliaments during the mandate of the current Commission. We welcome this commitment by the Commission to be more readily available and we urge them to keep us updated on the steps they are taking to stand by it. (para 18)

The case for a greater focus on public awareness

124. We believe it is important that the public knows about the work we are doing, under the scrutiny reserve, in their name. (para 38)

125. More can always be done to ensure that our Calls for Evidence are better publicised and reach a wide group of people and to ensure that our reports are promoted to the public at large and not just to already interested groups and expert witnesses. (para 40)

126. If the public is to become better informed about our work it is essential that we interact effectively with the media and secure the best press coverage we can for our work. This is desirable in two regards: firstly increased press coverage will raise our profile and ensure our work reaches a larger and more diverse audience. Secondly if our profile is raised through the media our reports may exert more influence over policy makers. (para 41)

127. Securing better publicity for our work may help us to better fulfil our core scrutiny function. Securing better publicity for our work might also help to raise the profile of the House itself and to restore public confidence in the role of parliament. If the Committee describes well and effectively the work we are doing, we will, in the end, have an effect on the public because we will show that Parliament is holding the Government to account properly and is being properly informed. (para 43)

128. We agree that there is no case for us to take on any form of agency role for any body outside the UK Parliament nor should we take on any additional role that might compromise the scrutiny role given to us by the House. (para 46)

129. The Europe Direct centres will meet the need for a European information service in the UK – there is no need for an additional service. (para 50)

130. The task of presenting and explaining the EU and its policies falls to the EU Institutions themselves. National governments make EU legislation collectively in the Council of Ministers, co-legislating with the European Parliament. National governments are directly accountable to their citizens. It is for national governments to explain and present the positions they take.

in the Council, and the decisions the Council collectively reaches. Greater transparency in the procedures of the Council is accordingly essential. Our job is to add value to the legislative process through scrutiny and analysis and to do so in as transparent a way as possible. We therefore welcome the launch of the Government’s new website and their commitment to support the Europe Direct information centres. We urge the Government to keep us fully informed of their initiatives in this area to ensure they are properly scrutinised. (para 53)

What needs did our evidence pinpoint?

131. More debate on EU issues in national parliaments is desirable. We have long argued and continue to believe that more debate time for European affairs should be made available in the House of Lords for debates on our own reports and wider European issues. (para 58)

132. Although we appreciate that our work is often dense and document-focused and, for that reason, will always interest specialised groups in particular, we nevertheless think that greater interaction with the public at large is a goal worth pursuing. (para 61)

Website re-design

133. Our website is in need of a re-design to make it easier to use. We fully support initiatives currently underway to deliver this re-design. (para 66)

134. We support, as a principal purpose of the re-design, the aim of improving the users’ ease of navigation of the website. Pages should be clearly signposted by topic area and forewords to and summaries of reports should be easily accessible. The possibility of linking the Committee’s website with popular internet search engines could be explored, to allow those unfamiliar with the work of the Committee to notice its reports on particular policy areas. (para 74)

135. We have previously recommended, and here re-affirm our recommendation, that all Government Explanatory Memoranda be made available free of charge to any interested parties on a dedicated Government website. (para 76)

136. On the re-designed website Committees should continue to post future meetings dates and should also list under these dates the main agenda items for each meeting as far in advance as they are able to do so. (para 77)

137. For the future the Committee’s priority would be to support new ways of effectively disseminating the results of our existing scrutiny work, such as reports and correspondence with ministers. (para 80)

Why is our work not getting more coverage in the media?

138. Whilst “dumbing down” the content of our reports would be highly undesirable it should be possible to make their presentation more lively and engaging to the reader through increased use of snappy facts and figures, uncluttered phrasing and the inclusion in each Report, where necessary, of a technical terms glossary. In addition full use should be made of the title of a Report and its foreword to capture the essence of each report and catch the reader’s attention. (para 84)
139. Members and Committee staff need to be more proactive in seeking out media attention. (para 85)

140. If we are to present our reports effectively we need to put faces to them—media attention for reports can more easily be secured if Members are willing to engage with the press and present their work. (para 86)

141. We intend to seek to ensure more press coverage of our work from the regional and specialised press. We will ensure that our press and publicity strategy for each report reflects its individual appeal to certain sectors of the press. (para 90)

**Improving our scrutiny of the Commission Annual Legislative and Work Programme (CWLP)**

142. Another way of ensuring that the House of Lords debates European issues more regularly would be for the statements on the outcome of each European Council meeting to be supplemented by a meaningful short debate. We recommend that such a debate be held within a week of each such statement. We already produce an annual report on the Commissions’ Work Programme, and each year we seek to improve our scrutiny of it. We recognise, however, that more can be done. We recommend that the House make time for an annual debate on the Commission’s Work Programme to be held in the Chamber of the House. (paras 93 and 94)

143. We think that it would be desirable for such a synchronised series of debates to take place annually across Europe but we recognise that practically it would be hard to implement this idea and that it would be impossible for a debate to be held in each Member State on the same day. We recommend that debates in Member States be held within a reasonably compact timeframe, perhaps within the same month. We await the outcome of the ongoing consultation on the suggestion and its attempted implementation with interest. (paras 100 and 101)

**The issues our reports cover**

144. Whilst we would not want to stop producing detailed, document-based scrutiny reports we recognise that reports on more widely based issues might be more successful in interesting the media and the public at large. (para 103)

145. There is a case for saying that Sub-Committees should conduct more wider, non-document based inquiries on topical European Union issues. Such reports would raise the profile of the Sub-Committees and engage a wider audience for their work. (para 104)

146. We will investigate with the House authorities means of better distributing our reports in the House. In addition, we will look at ways of making our work more accessible to schools and universities. (para 108)

147. All of our reports already contain a foreword, which gives a flavour of the report, and an outline of key recommendations and conclusions. We will investigate ways of making these sections of our reports more widely available to Members of the House of Lords, journalists and the wider public. In addition Sub-Committee Chairs and other interested Members will continue to look for opportunities to promote their Committee Reports to interested groups in Brussels. (paras 109 and 113)
More proactive Members?

148. The paragraphs in Chapter 4 on being more proactive and on educational initiatives make suggestions for how we, our Sub-Committees and individual Committee Members, might go about promoting our work within the House and beyond. These suggestions will be considered by us and our Sub-Committees and acted on where appropriate. (para 122)
APPENDIX 1: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Background to the Call for Evidence
The Committee agreed the Call for Evidence in December 2005. At a subsequent meeting on Tuesday 14 February the Committee deliberated on the written evidence received and, as a result, decided to focus the inquiry on the subject of “Public Awareness and the role of the House of Lords in the EU legislative process” rather than the broader, and perhaps more contentious, topic of “Presenting and explaining the European Union”. The Committee’s revised focus for the inquiry was advertised in the following terms: “The Committee...decided, as a contribution to the fostering of a more informed public understanding of the work of the EU, to focus its inquiry on the identification of practical steps that could be taken to broaden and improve public understanding of the work of the House of Lords in scrutinising EU legislation”. Witnesses were called to give oral evidence on this basis.

The Call for Evidence
The House of Lords European Union Committee has decided to conduct an inquiry into whether the House could, in addition to its present work of publicly scrutinising the European Union and its legislation, play any further role in ensuring that matters relating to the European Union are clearly and objectively explained to the citizen.

If the House of Lords could play such a role there is then a further question, namely whether it would be appropriate for the House to do so.

There is currently much talk in the European Union about the need for greater engagement between the Union and its citizens and the Commission has launched a series of initiatives in this regard. The Committee will not be conducting a wide ranging inquiry into how the European Union communicates with citizens across the board but will instead be conducting a more focused inquiry, based around the different parliamentary models for presenting and explaining the European Union to the citizen.

The Committee would be pleased to have your views. The Committee would, in particular, welcome your views on any or all of the following questions:

General Initiatives affecting National Parliaments

1. What role do the Commission’s “Plan D\textsuperscript{51} for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” and other initiatives of the European Institutions envisage for national parliaments as regards improving the presentation and explanation of European Union issues to the citizen? How far would it be appropriate for national parliaments to play such a role?

2. On a more general level, is there really a lack of information about the EU as opposed to a lack of political engagement in EU matters?

The Conference of Speakers in Budapest in June 2005 welcomed the declaration on the role of national parliaments in the European debate (Raise National European Awareness) and called upon the national parliaments “to hold a debate, preferably in plenary session each year, on the annual legislative and work

\textsuperscript{51} http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0494en01.pdf
programme of the European Commission with due regard for their internal work programme, legal framework and traditions”.

- Is the idea of a near simultaneous debate on the Commission’s AWP across all Member States a) desirable and b) practical?

**Initiatives in the UK**

- What steps is the Government taking to explain the EU more effectively to the public and what degree of success are such measures encountering? How far should the House of Lords seek to add value to this work?

- In the interests of transparency should the Government’s Explanatory Memoranda on EU legislation be made available by the Government on the internet?

- In addition to its current work, what role could the House of Lords play in presenting and explaining EU matters to the citizen and in listening to citizen’s views? And, if there is such a role for the House to play, would it be appropriate for the House to undertake this work?

**Much of the House of Lord’s current work in EU matters is conducted via the European Union Select Committee and its Sub-Committees**:

- Given that the Committee’s work is, for the most part, based on analysing and presenting the views of expert witnesses, how far should we be seeking a more general connection with “the public”?

- If the Committee were to take steps to improve the way we communicate with the public at large how far might we be thought to be trespassing on the work of the elected representatives in the House of Commons?

- To what extent does the time-scale of the Committee’s work allow for any further general consultation with the public?

- If the Committee were to commit to consulting the public in a more systematic way how might we best go about this?

- How might the Committee’s website be improved and be made more accessible and attractive?

**The Danish/Swedish EU Information Centres**

*Both Denmark and Sweden have EU information Centres attached to (but independent from) their parliaments which answer enquiries from citizens on European Union issues. Both centres are politically impartial*.

- How do the Centres operate in practice?

- What resources do the centres have?
• How far do the Information Centres operate under the guidance of Members or are they run entirely by Officials? If they are run by Officials, how are these Officials selected?

• How is political impartiality guaranteed in these Centres? How far do the political processes in the Parliament interact with the Centre?

• Who uses these Centres and why do they do so?

• How to these Centres publicise their services?

• How is the success of these Centres monitored and publicised?

• What, in terms of practical politics, would be the realistic prospect of our House ever agreeing to set up such a service?

• Would it be practically viable for the House of Lords to set up such a service?

The Irish National Forum for Europe

The Irish National Forum for Europe⁵⁴ was set up in the wake of the rejection of the Nice Treaty, in the referendum held on 7 June 2001, to provide the basis for an inclusive and broadly-based debate on Ireland’s participation in the European Union.

• What resources are needed to run the Forum and how is it funded?

• What is the commitment in terms of Members’ time?

• What is the practical impact of the Forum on debates in Ireland on European issues and how is this impact assessed?

• What problems has the Forum encountered thus far?

• Would such a forum fit in the British political culture and if so how might it be introduced?

⁵⁴ http://www.forumoneurope.ie/
APPENDIX 2: REVISED MEDIA ACTION PLAN

The mass media is still the forum through which most people receive their information about politics and Parliament. While the importance of other, more direct methods of communicating with the public are growing it is still vital that the House of Lords Committees communicate effectively with the media and seek to improve and increase their coverage.

Coverage other than at report publication

An area of opportunity is to focus on coverage at times other than report publication. One way this can be achieved is by proactive and extensive promotion of newsworthy evidence sessions. This will not only generate immediate coverage of the session but also help raise the profile of the inquiry and plant it firmly at the forefront of journalists’ minds. This should help in attempting to get the final report higher on the media’s daily agenda at publication.

A further positive step would be to develop the role of the Committees and Committee Chairmen as experts who can react to news events closely aligned with the work of their Committee. Individual Chairmen will have to decide with their Committees if this is a role they wish to take on and if so make themselves available to provide reactive lines. The reputation of the House of Lords in general and the Committees in particular as independent experts in their field can be built on to achieve this. The broadcast media and rolling news channels in particular are often keen for credible, independent voices to comment on the days political stories: we should seek to make the best use of this. Such steps would also fit with Puttnam recommendations that Parliament should seek to communicate with public on a daily basis and not at irregular intervals. The first step to establishing this approach is to produce a standardised contact sheet of Committee Chairmen and make this available to the press officer and the Information Office.

The process of developing the Committee’s profile at times other than report publication will also be helped by an increased and focused effort to develop informal contacts with lobby and specialist journalists. Steps to achieve this include regular visits by the press officer to the Parliamentary Press Lobby to raise interest in reports as well as evidence sessions and inquiries in general. Other approaches include contact development programmes with specialist journalists on national newspapers and journals to bring the important work of the Committee to their attention. This will include specific efforts linked to particular reports as well as general efforts to raise the profile of the Lords Committees.

Further informal approaches built around reports could include inviting journalists on relevant publications to informal briefings with members of the Committee during the inquiry. This gives Committees the opportunity to use the facilities of the House to have lengthy face to face briefings with journalists and to put Committees priorities on their agenda. A suitable method of achieving this could be inviting journalists to tea in the Lords. This will be a significant draw to journalists not based in Parliament and should ensure a suitable atmosphere for lengthy discussion and promotion of the Committee’s work.

The press function in the report process

The press officer should be involved in inquiry process at as early a stage as possible. A suitable approach would be for an initial meeting to be held between the press officer, the Clerk and possibly the Chairman of the relevant Committee
at the outset of the inquiry. This could be timed to take place following the issuing of the call for evidence as by this stage the aims and scope of the inquiry would be becoming clear. This would enable to Clerk and the press officer to discuss the aims of the inquiry and attempt to identify the newsworthy elements likely to emerge. This should ensure that potential key findings can be identified at an early stage. It would also focus the Clerk’s thoughts on the media opportunities associated with each report. A follow up meeting could then be held after the last public evidence session and prior to the drafting of the foreword to the Report. This will enable the press officer to advise on the most newsworthy elements of the report and pick out phrases and findings that could be highlighted. This should help ensure that forewords are suitable for journalists needs and help in drafting focused and effective press releases.

**Press releases and different types of media**

It is vital that press releases are able to draw on one or two key facts or memorable quotes to catch journalists’ attention. Clerks and Committee members must be aware that journalists and broadcast producers receive hundreds of press releases each day and will be often only have time to look for a “top line” before deciding whether to read the rest of the press release. It is therefore vital that each press release has an effective hook that will draw them into the story and encourage them to cover it. Regardless of how effective a press officer is in promoting a report, if the key recommendations are not succinct and easily communicated to a mass audience it will not get coverage in the mainstream national press.

When communicating with the media it is important we consider the realistic levels of coverage in different media outlets. Tabloids will not cover reports in great depth but will reach a much wider audience that the broadsheets alone. Tabloids also reach an audience often not actively engaged with politics. This fits with the Puttnam agenda of reaching out to and communicating with a wider public. It is important that the benefit of a short mention in a tabloid is not underestimated. A quick mention in *The Sun* that focuses on one key recommendation in a wider report will reach upwards of 7 million readers. Some of these readers may be interested in the subject and choose to investigate the Committee’s recommendations further by, for example, visiting the Committee’s pages on the Parliamentary website. This again shows the importance of effective top lines and of punchy well written press releases. Tabloid journalists will often have to boil down reports to less than 100 words, so effectively drawing out the key points in a report is vital to ensure tabloid coverage.

Other important avenues of publicity include publications targeted specifically at opinion formers and those actively involved in politics. Publications such as *The House Magazine* offer an opportunity for Committee members to contribute articles and give detailed explanations of an inquiries’ findings. This approach to placing articles should ensure that the Lords Committees maintain a high profile amongst Parliamentarians and other opinion formers. It also gives the opportunity for comprehensive analysis of the Committee’s work for audiences who take an active interest in Parliamentary business.

An important and growing media sector is internet based news services. This ranges from the internet sites of traditional news agencies and newspapers as well as solely web based media. The expansion of audiences getting their news from internet sources gives new opportunities for coverage. This can include mentions on general news sites such as the BBC’s online service, to political interest sites such as epolitix.com as well as specialist sites relevant to particular inquiries. This
final category has the benefit of serving audiences who may be directly affected by and interested in Committee recommendations.

A similar benefit applies to coverage in specialist journals. Advances can be made here by a development of the informal contacts programme and a more proactive approach to involving journalists working on these publications in order to generate interest. It is also important to consider the varied lead times and editorial slants of particular journals.

**Broadcasters**

A final consideration for the Committee is how to better communicate with broadcasters and achieve more coverage on TV and Radio. Broadcast media will now often set the news agenda for the day ahead. During his evidence to the Committee Michael White identified The Today programme as a key broadcaster in terms of breaking a story that will then run throughout the day. On TV BBC Breakfast and GMTV could be seen in a similar light. These breakfast shows, which have a good reputation and large audiences often make scheduling decisions at between 9pm and Midnight the evening prior to the show. Bearing this in mind it is important Committee Chairmen are flexible and available to fill interview requests that may not be confirmed until this late stage.

It is also important not to dismiss the rolling news channels as a method of reaching the public. Interviews for News 24 or Sky News will often be repeated through the day and will reach an audience actively interested in current affairs. Clips done during the day for News 24 can also potentially be used by the main BBC news for the evening bulletins if a story is interesting enough. There is a training budget available for Committee members who feel they would benefit from media training. Knowing how to communicate key messages effectively during an interview is a significant and specific skill. Any Committee Chairmen who are likely to appear in the media would be well advised to take part in some media training if they have not already done so.

The use of press conferences in promoting reports should be better planned to give more opportunity for broadcast coverage. Most reports will not justify a press conference as print journalists’ questions and requests for interviews can be dealt with on the phone to improve flexibility and effectively fit around publications varied deadlines. However when a report is suitably high profile to justify a press conference we should make the effort to make the press conference visually exciting by holding it at a venue relevant to the report. This would avoid dull scenario of a press conference consisting of several talking heads sitting at a table in the House. This is very unattractive to broadcasters and is likely to deter them from attending. A much more attractive proposition is a press conference held at, to use an example relevant to a recent inquiry, a children’s hospital which brings home to viewers the impact the report’s recommendations will have on ordinary people on a daily basis. A way to organise these photogenic press conferences could be for the press officer to liaise with the press offices of witness organisations and potentially hold press conferences at their locations if they are relevant to the inquiry and suitably visually interesting.

There are significant opportunities for the Committee to improve and increase coverage across all sectors of the media. This is an important process as communicating effectively with the public often means communicating through the media. This is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future even as new developments in direct communication emerge.
APPENDIX 3: SUB-COMMITTEE D’S WEBFORUM EXPERIMENT

Introduction

In January, Sub-Committee D (Environment and Agriculture) launched a “webforum” as part of its current inquiry into the safety of nuclear installations and the management of nuclear waste within the EU.

A website was set up which could be accessed through the Sub-Committee’s main webpage. The general public were invited to inform the Sub-Committee of their views on nuclear waste and safety by emailing their views to the Sub-Committee via the webpage.

The website remained active for two months and closed at the end of March when the Sub-Committee held its last oral evidence session of the inquiry. The Sub-Committee is now deliberating on the evidence heard and will publish a report in June.

The Sub-Committee have considered the responses received and considered it appropriate to invite the Select Committee to consider i) the effectiveness of the webforum; ii) what use to make of the information it generates; and iii) what future use the Select Committee could make of webforums.

i) Effectiveness of the webforum

What responses were received?

22 responses were received. Those responding were members of the public with opinions on the use of nuclear energy; academics; and specialists who had not contributed to the Call for Evidence. One spam mail submission was received.

What happened to the responses?

The responses were circulated to the Committee for consideration in the same way as written evidence received in response to the Call for Evidence that had been circulated. The responses were pasted on the webforum website (with personal information withheld).

How successful was the exercise?

The positive outcomes of the webforum exercise were as follows:

- Raising the profile of the Committee and its inquiry: A press release was launched in conjunction with the webforum and was publicised by specialist media
- Providing another route through which the public could contribute to the inquiry: The responses provided interesting views from the public on nuclear energy. The information received also had the potential to yield useful possible oral witnesses
ii) Use of responses

**What significance should be given to the responses received?**

A key question for the Sub-Committee to consider is whether information received through the webforum should be treated the same as written evidence submitted in response to the Call for Evidence.

The webforum responses were less detailed and less specific than the written evidence submitted in response to the Call for Evidence. Web responses tended to state personal views on nuclear energy in general without offering detailed arguments to support positions. Responses did not make reference to the Commission’s draft proposals upon which the inquiry is based. This was to be expected given the broad nature of the questions the public were invited to respond to.

As a result, the Select Committee is invited to note that the Sub-Committee’s recommendations and conclusions will be informed by the views expressed in the web responses; but the detail of the report will build extensively on the written and oral evidence received.

**How should the responses be published?**

The webforum responses can be viewed online on the Sub-Committee’s website. It is intended that they will remain available online until the Sub-Committee publishes its report. However, the Select Committee is invited to note that the Sub-Committee intends that the webforum responses will not be published in hard copy with the report but instead will be available from the Record Office upon request.

iii) Future use of webforums

**What are the advantages of webforums?**

Webforums provide the following distinctive touches which can enhance the work of the Select Committee and its Sub-Committees:

- It is a web-based tool: The Call for Evidence is essentially a paper document which is made available online. In contrast, the webforum exists online and thus offers a new scope for contact with the public.
- It can reach a new audience: The webforum may be a more appealing and accessible way for the public to reach the Select Committee: one click and your views are emailed direct.
- It generates a new source of information: The webforum generated responses from individuals who had not taken the opportunity to respond to the Call for Evidence.
- It generates a new form of information: Responses tended to be less formal in style and approach than written evidence responses.

These characteristics suggest that the webforum is not best-suited as a medium for the Select Committee to seek answers to specific questions (a role already fulfilled by the Call for Evidence); however, webforums could be used to offer the public a new and complementary route through which the public could participate with parliamentary scrutiny.
How can the effectiveness of webforums be maximised?

The Sub-Committee webforum highlighted two main issues for the future:

- The topic being considered should be an “in the news” item of interest to the general public; and
- Questions posed should act as a springboard for opinion rather than be fact-seeking.

Webforums could be used to invite the public to suggest possible topics for inquiry (although the Committee could experience orchestrated lobbying); or could be used at the beginning of an inquiry to identify possible witnesses to pursue for written or oral evidence; or at the end of an inquiry to invite comments on a published report. The experience of using the webforum must always be enjoyable to the user; thus, careful attention must be paid to the presentation and accessibility of the website.

To maximise its usefulness, a webforum should become just that—a forum for discussion whereby users can add their submission and other users can post their comments on that submission. The Select Committee could feed into this discussion by allowing, for example, Chairmen to appear online at set times to answer directly users’ questions.

Of course, moves to use webforums to this extent would require careful consideration of the use of material received and the technical capability of the parliamentary website. The Committee would need to consider what added value would be achieved from each forum, and whether the parliamentary website would be the most appropriate site to host such debate (many media sites already host advanced webforums e.g. BBC).

*Lord Renton of Mount Harry*

*11 April 2006*
APPENDIX 4: PARLIAMENT’S INTERNET STRATEGY

Introduction

This document sets out the strategy for developments to parliament’s Internet website.

The business context

This strategy derives from elements of the strategic plans of the two Houses as follows:

The outline strategic plan for the House of Commons 2006–2011:

- includes in the statement of the purpose of the House of Commons Service “makes its work and information about that work widely accessible to the general public”;
- has as the third primary objective of the Service: “To promote public knowledge and understanding of the work and role of Parliament through the provision of information and access”;
- has as one of six supporting tasks: “to ensure that information is well-managed in pursuit of the primary objectives, in part by exploiting technology effectively.”

The House of Lords strategic plan 2006–2009:

- has as a core task: “to make the House and its work accessible to the public”;
- one of the House’s eight strategic objectives is to: “Improve public access to, and understanding and knowledge of, the work of the House of Lords and its heritage”;
- another is: “Develop information and communication strategies to give parliamentary and public users ready access to parliamentary information, when they want it and without having to know where it is held.”

This strategy also aligns with the Information Management Strategy 2005 being developed as part of the Corporate Plan of the Commons, with input from the Lords. That strategy seeks to give parliamentary and public users ready access to the information they need and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Parliament by creating and exploiting a common knowledge base supported by a resilient infrastructure with ready access for users and streamlined processes for providers of information.

This strategy also aligns with the Public Information Strategy being developed as part of the Corporate Plan of the Commons, with input from the Lords. That strategy has as its overall goal the improvement of public understanding and knowledge of the work of Parliament and an increase in its accessibility. Among its core themes are:

- Inform—making parliamentary information accessible to the public and others
• Promote—helping the public recognise that Parliament acts in their interests and enabling them easily to find out about its work and role independent and distinct from Government

• Listen—provide a mechanism for Parliament to seek and respond to feedback in order to better engage people with its work and to help the public recognise that Parliament is an institution which listens impartially to their views in support of its constitutional role.

The strategic aims of the website
Parliament’s website will help to deliver on all these strategic aims of the business of Parliament, provided that the strategic business driver for the website is not technology but communication. The website will support Parliament in its efforts to engage with the public in an active, specific and relevant manner. The more effective the website is the greater will be public understanding, support for and input into Parliament.

The strategic aims of the website are accordingly to:

• make information easily accessible to all users;
• promote Parliament;
• provide tools to allow Parliament the opportunity to listen to those who wish to communicate with Members or the administration.

Strategic Aim (1): Accessible information
The website as it stands is a valuable repository of information but does not make this information accessible to all users. Who are the users? There are many different “audiences” for Parliament’s website, including at least:

• Citizens in general, including young people (16–24), the generalist or casual users who are most likely to be deterred at present.

• Specialist users – Members of both Houses and staff, academics, lobby groups, opinion formers, the broadsheet press and other informed users: these are regular informed users who may understand much of the language and nature of parliamentary business but need improved tools to find what they are looking for quickly and consistently.

• Children in school (up to 18) and their teachers and parents or guardians, requiring primarily educational material.

There are many other ways of categorising individuals, and different individuals fall into different categories at different times. But the website will aim to make information accessible to at least these three general categories of user. The website will operate differently for these different categories, where appropriate with different content, different levels of writing, different search options and different navigation routes.

The language of the website will be English but this will not preclude the provision of material in other languages where there is a business need to do so.
The website will accordingly:

- have lively and compelling content and use language and styles of writing that are outward-looking and make explicit rather than implicit assumptions about the reader’s level of knowledge of Parliament, avoiding acronyms and jargon where possible, while respecting the value of “core” documents for specialist users;

- be responsive to the needs of the audience, presenting information in different ways; the possibility of allowing personalisation by individual users will be explored;

- make information available by issue as well as by content type: users will be able to indicate subjects of interest so that they can be alerted to new relevant content in a variety of ways;

- make available standard basic information about each Member and their Parliamentary activities—the website will enable links to be made between individual parliamentarians and their many roles and activities;

- make content available to a wide range of devices e.g. SmartPhones and PDAs, as well as conventional computers;

- be a single website, coherent across media: material will be cross-referenced and linked, not isolated, and placed in context so that the reader is never in doubt what something means; webcasting of debates and committees will be improved and extended, captioning and links will be added, integrating the written record with the video and audio feed;

- have logical and consistent navigation and access, using best practices of website layout;

- allow more efficient searching: search and retrieval (“finding”) will be intuitive, quick and easy to use, enabling even first-time users to find the information they are looking for, while not restricting the ability of more advanced searchers to find material in ways they want;

- provide an authoritative and complete archive of parliamentary material relating to both the work of Parliament and its heritage; information will be managed as an asset.

- work on the principle that material on the website is openly available by default, restricting access to and re-use of content only where specifically required;

- recognise in its information architecture and technical implementation that its content forms an important part of the Internet as a whole and not just of Parliament’s website;

- expect users to arrive directly at content through external search engines and external inbound links;

- store information wherever possible in open formats that don’t require end users to have specific software or technology.

- recognise that Parliament is both a working legislature and an historic institution.
Strategic Aim (2): Promoting Parliament

The website is and must remain an authoritative and comprehensive source of information. That in itself promotes Parliament. But the more effective the website is in making information accessible, the more it will promote the work of Parliament by connecting Parliament to the public. The website will accordingly:

- be the authoritative source for parliamentary material;
- provide immediate access to new Parliamentary information as it becomes available;
- create a good first impression on the user;
- enable all groups of users to recognise the distinction between government and Parliament and the independent scrutiny role of Parliament in holding government to account;
- increase the level of public understanding of Parliament;
- enable active collaboration on content creation with selected third parties and be designed to help intermediaries (such as other websites) easily to pick up and then amplify Parliament’s message, and to reuse material (including through the use of syndication technology) and thereby connect more people with the work of Parliament;
- include educational material, linked to current business that is compelling, topical and up-to-date;
- itself be actively promoted.

In addition, if interactive tools are provided and used effectively, this will send a positive message about Parliament thus promoting its work.

Strategic Aim (3): Listening

What is meant by “Parliament listening”? “Parliament” has many meanings. At one level Parliament is the two Houses taking collective action—in passing legislation for example. At another level Parliament means the individual members of the two Houses acting as individual Members of Parliament or as members of cross-party select committees or in party groups or special interest all-party groups. At another it is the administration. On occasion one House or the other can act collectively without the other. Understanding this complex web of relationships is central to understanding how far “Parliament” can indeed listen.

Whatever is meant by Parliament listening, it is clear that users’ expectations of the internet and the services they can access through it are high, and can only increase. The technology enabling interaction through websites too is constantly developing. A website that does not allow users to interact with it in ways they expect will damage the reputation of the organisation that set it up, as well as missing opportunities to engage with the users. Interactive web technology offers the potential for rapid and widespread access in a way that traditional means of input do not and this gives rise to expectations.

The Parliament website will accordingly facilitate opportunities for interactive participation by the public and provide tools that could allow Parliament to listen to and engage with the public. Some current ideas are listed in the Annex, although Parliament will strive to combine some of these technologies in new ways or define new methods of interaction with an emphasis on engaging the public
without creating extra burdens on Members or Officials. Parliament should focus on those things it can do especially well and leave more “leading edge” ideas to others.

Decisions will need to be taken determining how far such tools for an interactive website should be deployed. Although the administration of Parliament has a role to play in “listening” (e.g. in managing feedback on the site and responding to inquiries) in the main the successful interactive deployment of such tools, and the consequent success of “listening”, will for the most part depend on the willingness, ability and enthusiasm of Members of the two Houses to use the tools provided. Such tools will accordingly be piloted with willing Members.

**Measure of success (1): How will we know if information is accessible?**

The measures of this aim include whether:

- the site receives greatly improved feedback from the public against the criterion “the website enables me to find out about the work of Parliament;”
- a casual user (that is any citizen, for example a constituent or a 16-year-old doing a GCSE) finds the website attractive, interesting and relevant, is at ease in using it and is drawn into the site, feeling more engaged with Parliament as a result;
- an informed user (such as a member of either House, a lawyer or a lobbyist) can find what they are looking for easily and will use the site in preference to others;
- children are educated and enthused and their teachers find the website a valuable resource capable of capturing pupils’ imagination;
- the number of users and their frequency of use increase.

**Measure of success (2): How will we know if the website promotes Parliament?**

The measures of this aim include whether:

- all groups of users are able to recognise the distinction between government and Parliament and the independent role of Parliament in holding government to account;
- there is an increase in the level of public understanding of Parliament that can be attributed to the website;
- it is possible for others to pick up and then amplify Parliament’s message;
- there is active collaboration on content creation with selected third parties;
- there is recognition from intermediaries that the website is the authoritative source and up-to-date source for Parliamentary material;
- there is recognition from intermediaries that the website is designed to help them reuse material and thereby connect more people with the work of Parliament;
- it is easy for the press or other websites to reuse material and bring Parliament to the public through the use of syndication technology;
• the Parliament website or content on it is increasingly referenced by other websites.

Measure of success (3): How will we know if the website enables Parliament to listen?

The measure of the third aim is less easy to define. An initial measure would be the level of engagement of Members of both Houses with opportunities provided. The overall measure of success will be whether, within the constraints of representative democracy and its constitutional role, Parliament is providing effective, sustained and valued opportunities for the public to be heard. But beyond this how far will it be possible (or appropriate) to measure whether contributions do have impacts? Does “listen” mean “influence”? Is influence direct or indirect? These questions will need to be assessed in determining how far to deploy interactive tools, but the website will in any event facilitate their availability if required. All these measures will need to be fine-tuned to ensure they can be quantified where possible as developments on the website take place. Measurement of success will be underpinned by a programme of evaluation and user-testing.

What other benefits should the website bring?

In addition to delivering on the three strategic aims set out in this paper the website should aim to bring other benefits including:

• gains in internal efficiency in the amount of time spent creating or finding information, by reliance on efficient and effective processes within Parliament, including adherence to the principle “create once use many times”—material will be generated and stored once and re-purposed many times;

• clearly understood roles respectively for electronic and paper publishing of Parliamentary material and the links between them, with core publications generated in web and print-ready formats;

• integration with material generated initially for internal purposes (such as via electronic document and records management systems (EDRM));

• reduced future costs by providing a resilient and scalable infrastructure for future requirements;

• fulfilling, interesting and useful development opportunities for staff.

Conclusion

A radical upgrade of the website will make it:

• welcoming and comprehensible;

• informative and engaging;

• coherent and easy to use, whilst remaining authoritative.

A sustainable programme of web development will ensure the site can innovate along with expectations and technology. An integrated web Content Management System (CMS) and related tools will be needed to ensure overall coherence and quality, and this will require a degree of central editorial control.
Whilst improvements in public understanding and levels of engagement are achievable, there are limits to how far an improved website can lead to the levels of engagement with the democratic process sought by some.

Overall, however, a radical upgrade of the website will enable Parliament to respond to demands for better provision of web services and by doing so will improve its efficiency and effectiveness. It will also help Parliament manage the serious reputational risk it would face if it did not respond to these demands.

*Internet Strategy Board*
**Annex: Some additional items for discussion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature name</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-line “voting”</td>
<td>As legislation goes through Parliament or as issues are debated, the public could indicate their views by voting. Each user would be limited to one “vote”.</td>
<td>May be seen to undermine rather than support the constitutional position of MPs and Parliament. (Votes would need to be limited to one per registered user to minimise but not avoid contrived outcomes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line text voting</td>
<td>As above but via text.</td>
<td>Modest charges could deter organised fraud and support the development of the site.</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-line Committee consultations.</td>
<td>Specific web pages are set up which outline the scope of an enquiry and invite on-line comments, contributions and debate. A moderator validates input and provides the committee with a summary so that bulk representations can be aggregated.</td>
<td>Parliament has tried a number of deliberative on-line forums with an outside moderator. Costs are high relative to the numbers responding. The value has been mainly symbolic. Committees would need to be satisfied that such processes add value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Petitions</td>
<td>A member of the public could raise a petition and encourage others to support it. After a fixed time, the petition could be referred to the standard Parliamentary process in either House – see right for the Commons. Outcomes – such as a response by the relevant government department – could by posted. The Scottish Parliament use e-Petitions.</td>
<td>Current Commons practice can be found here. In essence an MP must present them, but does not support them. They are not debated but are forwarded to a Govt Dept. Replies may be received. The Modernisation Committee Report wanted to change the petition process but did not foresee any electronic delivery. Would require procedural change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blogs /comments/ graffiti page –</td>
<td>This could be an extension or alternative to comments alongside debates, etc. The BBC uses this.</td>
<td>Requires moderation. Selection would be fraught. Would run the risk that those posting comments were frustrated if outcomes did not change.</td>
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<td>people able to send their views so</td>
<td></td>
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<td>that a moderator could reflect the public mood.</td>
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<td>Comments on Hansard speeches, draft bills, or Committee reports.</td>
<td>This might be similar to theyworkforyou.com so that members of the public could post comments adjacent to pieces of Parliamentary text.</td>
<td>Requires a moderator and contributors would need to be signed-up and validated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-line questions answered by an MP/Peer, possibly via a webcast.</td>
<td>A topic and / or answerer could be lined up for a fixed time. People could then e-mail / text their questions / comments. A facilitator would then select some for answers. These could either be posted on the site or a webcast could be placed where the facilitator put the questions.</td>
<td>Would require dedicated and managed use of Members’ time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback loops</td>
<td>On-line polls asking for comments / scores on the site.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications with other specialists – “peer to peer communications”</td>
<td>The Parliamentary website could be linked to those run by specialist groups to facilitate “knowledge exchange.” An example would be where</td>
<td>Some examples are given in the Puttnam Report – para 4.40: a committee page linked to a website which set out the views of the specialists or individuals with interests in the topic of inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikis</td>
<td>Users could write their own guide to parliament!</td>
<td>Probably not necessary—wikipedia covers Parliament; other tools outlined above provide similar opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive tour of Parliament following a bill through its legislative stages</td>
<td>Would allow users to see and experience the work of Parliament and interact (e.g. vote on this amendment now!)</td>
<td>Could be instead of or as well as an interactive tour of the heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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APPENDIX 5: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following witnesses gave evidence. Those marked ** gave both oral and written evidence; those marked * gave oral evidence only; those without an asterisk gave written evidence only.

Mr Douglas Alexander MP, Minister for Europe
Ms Elisabeth Arnold, MP, Social Liberals, Chairman, Danish Parliament*
Ms Eva Arvidsson, Social Democrat, Swedish Parliament*
Mr Leif Björnlod, Green Party, Swedish Parliament*
Mr Erling Bonnesen, MP, Liberal Party, Danish Parliament*
Brethren Christian Fellowship
Mr Richard Corbett MEP
Mr Brendan Donnelly, Director, The Federal Trust
P R E Double, Remembrancer, City Remembrancer, Guildhall
Mr Andrew Duff MEP, Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
Ms Lone Dybkjaer, MP, Social Liberals, Danish Parliament’s EU Committee*
Ms Mára Dzirniece, Head of The Saeima EU Information Centre, Parliament of Latvia
Ms Annelie Enochsson, Christian Democrat, Swedish Parliament*
European Commission Representation in the UK
Christopher Gill RD, Hon Chairman of the Freedom Association
Mr Carl B Hamilton, Deputy Chairman, Liberal, Swedish Parliament*
Mr Agne Hansson, Centre Party, Swedish Parliament*
Senator Maurice Hayes, Chairman of Ireland’s National Forum on Europe
Mr John Hipwood, Political Editor, Wolverhampton Express & Star
Ms Lene Jensen, MP, Social Democrats, Danish Parliament*
Dr Philipp Kiiver, LLM, Assistant Professor, Maastricht University
Mr Ray Kirtley, International Resource Centre for Schools and Colleges
Mr Jo Leinen, Chairman of the Constitutional Affairs Committee, European Parliament

Mr Lars Lindblad, Moderate Party, Swedish Parliament*

Mr Declan McHugh, Director, Parliament and Government Programme, Hansard Society

Ms Sandy Mewies AM, Chair to the European and External Affairs Committee, National Assembly for Wales

Mr Ashley Mote MEP

Mr Kenneth Munro, Chairman, European Movement

Lord Norton of Louth, a Member of the House, Professor of Government, University of Hull **

Mr Fredrik Olovsson, Social Democrat, Swedish Parliament*

Mrs Anne Palmer

Lord Pearson of Rannoch, a Member of the House

Mr Dermot Scott, Director of the European Parliament UK Office

Ms Helle Sjelle, MP, Conservative Party, Danish Parliament*

Mr Sven-Erik Sjöstrand, Left Party, Swedish Parliament*

Rt Hon the Lord Strathclyde, Leader of the Opposition, House of Lords

Mr Tommy Waidelich, Chairman, European Affairs Committee of the Swedish Parliament, Social Democrat*

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission

Mr Martin Westlake, Head of Communications, European Economic and Social Committee

Mr Michael White, Political Editor, The Guardian

Lord Williamson of Horton, a Member of the House**

Baroness Williams of Crosby, a Member of the House**
APPENDIX 6: RECENT REPORTS FROM THE SELECT COMMITTEE

Session 2002–03


Government Responses: Review of Scrutiny of European Legislation, Europol’s Role in Fighting Crime; and EU Russia Relations (20th Report Session 2002–03, HL Paper 99)


Session 2003–04

The Future Role of the European Court of Justice (6th Report Session 2003–04, HL Paper 47)


Session 2004–05


Strengthening national parliamentary scrutiny—the Constitution’s subsidiarity early warning mechanism (14th Report, Session 2004–05, HL Paper 101)


Finland’s National Parliamentary Scrutiny of the EU (16th Report, Session 2004–05, HL Paper 103)

Session 2005–06


Ensuring Effective Regulation in the EU (9th Report, Session 2005–06, HL Paper 33)

Evidence from the Minister for Europe – the European Council and the UK Presidency (10th Report, Session 2005–06, HL Paper 34)


Minutes of Evidence

TAKEN BEFORE THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2005

Present: Blackwell, L; Bowness, L; Dubs, L; Goodhart, L; Grenfell, L (Chairman); Maclellan of Rogart, L; Radice, L; Thomas of Walliswood, B; Tomlinson, L; Woolmer of Leeds, L.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Ms Elisabeth Arnold, MP, Social Liberals, Chairman; Mr Erling Bonnensen, MP, Liberal Party; Ms Lene Jensen, MP, Social Democrats; Ms Helle Sjelle, MP, Conservative Party; and Ms Lone Dybkjaer, MP, Social Liberals, Danish Parliament’s EU Committee, examined.

Chairman: Ms Arnold, Madam Chairman, and fellow members of your Committee, you are extremely welcome here. We are very grateful that you could find the time to come and visit with the Committee. I know that you have lost somewhere—we hope they are safe—three members of your Committee. We are missing a few Members of our own, partly due to the rather unusual timing of the meeting and some were not able to escape other commitments. We have the majority of the Committee here. We are all very much looking forward to an exchange with you. It would be very useful for us to hear from you a bit about the work of your Committee and the structure. May I at the outset say a few words about how we are structured too and how we do our work? We are being taped for our website. It is broadcast live on our website so this is a public meeting and therefore we are on the record. Could I begin by saying a few words about the work of the House of Lords select committee? In some ways it is rather unique in that the House of Lords does not have a series of committees concerned with domestic policy but we do have a select committee and seven sub-committees focused entirely on the European Union. I do not know of any other chamber that is organised quite in that way, but it does work well because we take our scrutiny work very seriously indeed. In my own view, the Committee and its sub-committees perform a very important constitutional function of holding the government to account. It also performs a very useful function in that it is able to look directly at what the European Commission and the other institutions of the European Union are doing, because it has a broad mandate which is to examine all matters relating to the European Union. We are organised as a select committee of 19 Members and seven sub-committees which at the moment have a maximum of 11. It is no secret that we are trying to increase it to 12 as a cap. We would not necessarily have 12. We would like to feel we could have 12 on each sub-committee, not just because of the considerable burden of work but also happily because there are many Members of the House of Lords who would like to serve on these committees. It is a pity if we are not able to accommodate those who are willing to contribute and want to be Members. We have therefore the select committee which is the senior committee, which is made up of the chairmen of the sub-committees and the rest are members of the sub-committees who are on a rotating basis selected to sit on the senior committee. The senior committee grants a great deal of autonomy to the sub-committees and I will explain that further in a moment. We have some of the chairmen here today of the seven sub-committees. Sub-committee A deals with economic and financial affairs and international trade. Lord Radice is the chairman of that sub-committee. He was formerly chairman of the treasury select committee in the House of Commons so he comes to this job with very considerable experience. Lord Woolmer is the chairman of sub-committee B which is focused very much on the internal market and is at the moment engaged in quite an interesting inquiry into the merits of including aviation emissions in the European emissions trading scheme. You may think that should be a matter for the environment sub-committee but it is an internal market matter dealing with transport as well. That falls under Lord Woolmer’s remit. Lord Bowness chairs the Sub-Committee dealing with common foreign and security policy and ESDP—its formal title is foreign affairs, defence and development policy committee. They have recently produced a good report on how to scrutinise CFSP which is a subject which we addressed in our COSAC meeting.
here a week ago. They are embarking on a big inquiry into the relations between the European Union and the African Union. I think that is coming up.

Lord Bowness: A final decision has to be made.

Q1 Chairman: Sub-committee D chairman, Lord Renton, is not here but his Sub-Committee deals with environment and agriculture. They are at the moment completing an important report on the reform of the sugar regime. Sub-committee E is law and institutions. They are at the moment dealing with the question of European small claims procedures and they will be dealing with human rights proofing and EU legislation. Sub-committee E is chaired by one of our Law Lords, the equivalent of a member of a Supreme Court, which eventually they will be under the current reforms. We have very distinguished legal representation on sub-committee E, not least also our senior legal adviser, Dr Kerse, who is legal adviser to the whole of the European Union select committee constellation. He sits with the select committee when it is meeting. Sub-committee F is on home affairs or interior ministry affairs. Lord Wright of Richmond, the former head of our Foreign Office, who is the chairman of that, is not able to be with us today. They at the moment are working on economic migration to the European Union. Finally, Baroness Thomas of Walliswood chairs sub-committee G which deals with social policy and consumer affairs. That includes health and education. They are at the moment working on consumer credit harmonisation. That gives you an idea of the range that we have. With up to 11 members on each committee that means some 70 Members of the House of Lords are directly engaged on a weekly basis, as the sub-committees meet weekly and the select committee almost weekly, in the scrutiny of European Union legislation. That is about one in four of the regular attenders of the House of Lords so it is quite a big operation. Let me say a very brief word about how we operate. As you will know because it happens to you as well, some 1,200 documents are deposited in Parliament every year and the government has a commitment to produce within days of a document being deposited an explanatory memorandum which is sent on with the draft proposal to the European select committee. The European select committee in the person of the chairman once a week conducts what we call a sift which is to decide what do with these documents. Some of the proposals may be of very minimal interest. They may be small, technical issues or something that we do not feel we need to explore. Therefore we can clear it right away. On the other hand, we may wish to send on to the appropriate Sub-Committee the proposal together with the explanatory memorandum which, as its name implies, is the government telling us what the timetables of the Council is going to be, what the policy issues are, what the regulatory impact assessments and the financial implications are in the proposal, the consultation, and so on. Those documents we may want to send on to the sub-committees for them to have a more detailed look. They may decide that a particular proposal warrants clarification by the government. Therefore, they enter into correspondence with the minister and the department concerned, asking for further information or clarification or highlighting concerns that we have about what may be in that directive. It may be that they decide to have a full scale inquiry into the issue which may end up as a substantial report which will be debated on the floor of the House. Those are the choices before them. We operate under what is called a scrutiny reserve which is a resolution passed by the House of Lords which tells the government that it may not take a position and vote in the Council until the scrutiny process has been completed. They are not required to agree with us and very often they do not. In some instances they take our advice, but they are required to withhold from action in the Council until that process has been completed. Then they are free to move. Occasionally they override the scrutiny reserve which means that they cannot wait. When they do that we demand a very full explanation and we are none too pleased when that happens. The government Cabinet Office is required to submit a list every six months of the overrides. This is a new departure and we have found that since this naming and shaming there has been a significant drop in the number of them. We are very keen to get our scrutiny started as far upstream in the process as possible. That is, to look very carefully at the annual work programme, not to wait until a draft directive drops into our in-tray, but to get early information and take an early look and, on the basis of that, be able to come to some early conclusions as to what we should be looking at. That includes looking at the subsidiarity and proportionality issues as well. So we do look at Green and White Papers, and we look at the annual work programme. We have a representative in Brussels who is feeding us information on what may be coming down the road towards us because we believe that the earlier you can get in the more effective your scrutiny will be. Finally, the Committee cooperates with the European Scrutiny Committee of the House of Commons, chaired by Mr Jimmy Hood, who you know well, but we have slightly different mandates. They are not required to make a judgment of the merits of draft proposals. They do not do a deep analysis. Their function is to warn that something is of high political or other interest to the House of Commons and that it should be looked at by other committees. We exchange information on a daily basis with them. The
Ms Arnold: Thank you. We are very pleased to be happening in Brussels. I can see a great deal of constitutional system would be very pleased. Nothing and they had no information about what we think somehow that the executive within the British very little to say, very little to do, they were told what to do which some of us would love, but I do not Commons they were both complaining that they had that you have this marvellous power to tell ministers to us about your own committee? We often quote the delegation here the last time the UK held the answer them but perhaps you could say a few words to us about your own committee? We often quote the existence of your committee as being exceptional in that you have this marvellous power to tell ministers what to do which some of us would love, but I do not think somehow that the executive within the British constitutional system would be very pleased.

Ms Arnold: Thank you. We are very pleased to be here and to see so many distinguished Members of the Committee. We are very honoured that you are all here and we look forward to the discussion. My name is Elisabeth Arnold. I am an MP for the Social Liberal Party in the Danish Parliament. I am chairman of the committee and I have four additional members of the committee here: Lene Jensen from the Social Democrats, Lone Dybkjaer from the Social Liberal Party who is also a former member of the European Parliament, Ms Helle Sjelle from the Conservative Party and Mr Erling Bonnesen from the Liberal Party. We have our assistants and consultants here and also a civil servant from the Danish embassy. We have the tradition of always visiting the country of the presidency. We have been doing that for many years. As you may know, the committee has been in existence for more than 30 years because we started even before we joined the Common Market in 1972. It was quite feared in Danish politics that the power would be taken away too much from the Parliament. We very often have minority governments in Denmark, as you know, and we have the proportional system. The Committee’s aim is to prevent a Danish minister returning from Brussels facing a majority against him. Our task is to go through the agenda before every Council meeting and see that the Danish Government does not commit itself to something which cannot be carried through or implemented afterwards in the Danish Parliament with a solid majority. We also concentrate upon the final decisions or political agreements where there is going to be some commitment from the participant sides. We have scrutiny where we go through every Council meeting and tell the minister that he can say yes or no to this or that. If we agree in the committee or there is a majority supporting the minister, he is free to move. Sometimes we give him a more broad mandate if he is going to negotiate for instance on CAP or fishing quotas. He can have a broad mandate if he needs to be able to manoeuvre to some degree. We can say, “You are not allowed to go beyond this”, or, “You must come back home.” We have been quite used to working like this for many years now and happily we have seen many countries in the European Union copy or do something which is the same on a weekly basis, trying to follow on a parliamentary level what is going on in Council meetings.

I am astonished to learn of the amount of work that you are doing in the House of Lords. I was part of the delegation here the last time the UK held the presidency and, at that time, I remember the committees in the House of Lords and the House of Commons they were both complaining that they had very little to say, very little to do, they were told nothing and they had no information about what happened in Brussels. I can see a great difference between then and now. I am very pleased to see that you are doing an immense amount of work. I envy you the number of members you have engaged in this work because in our Parliament we are the hard core specialists, perhaps 20 or 25 members in the Danish Parliament, who are very keen on European affairs work. All the rest are doing something else. You have 70 members working in European matters and that must be wonderful. Can you, for instance, confirm that there have been developments in the intensity with which you work on European matters?

Q2 Chairman: Yes. I should point out that the 70 Members of the House of Lords who work on these committees are not all extreme europhiles. There are all tendencies represented but, on the other hand, I think it is safe to say that people join these committees because they are genuinely interested in what is going on. They may be highly critical of what is going on but they have that interest. It is interesting to hear what you say about the last time you were here in the last presidency. I do not think anybody around this table needs to plead guilty because we are all new faces from those days. The interest is absolutely genuine and there is a job of work to be done. Since the House of Lords has the privilege by virtue of its mandate to do a proper, qualitative analysis of the draft legislation, it does take people with a real interest in it to do it. Some of our committees are full of distinguished lawyers like Lord Goodhart and Lord Maclean, ofrogart, who incidentally was a member of the Convention, as was Lord Tomlinson. We have lawyers; we have doctors; we have industrialists; we have trade unionists; we have senior military figures and all sorts of people and educationalists represented on these Committees so we do have the expertise to be able to do the job properly.
EU Legislation—Public Awareness of the Scrutiny Role of the House of Lords

18 October 2005  Ms Elisabeth Arnold, MP, Mr Erling Bonnesen, MP, Lene Jensen, MP, Ms Helle Sjelle, MP and Ms Lone Dybkjaer

Ms Jensen: When we visited the Scrutiny Committee they told us that they rarely deal with people outside of the Parliament. They do not have many lobbyists telling them what they think, probably because they are not supposed to deal with the cases in substances. They just send them to other places if they think it is relevant. You can deal with the cases and send them to sub-committees where they can do something?

Q3 Chairman: Yes.

Ms Jensen: Do you have a lot of contact with people, companies or organisations who feel they might be affected?

Chairman: Yes, because we put out a call for evidence.

Baroness Thomas of Walliswood: On the whole, I think people are very pleased to come and give evidence before this Committee and its sub-committees. The reports are treated with high regard outside this House. As it happens, a while ago I had to go to Edinburgh on behalf of the Committee, as Lord Grenfell could not go, to accept a prize from those librarians across the country who are dealing with European affairs and who said categorically that the best reports on these European matters come from the House of Lords. I do not take any credit for that because at that time I was not doing the work that I am doing at the present moment, but people do come on the whole very willingly. They give us the benefit of their expertise. We have had business people, for example, who are doing this international credit harmonisation work so naturally we have had people from the credit industry. We have had people from those other organisations who are concerned at the level of debt increase. You can get a very wide range of different sorts of people. In nearly 100 per cent of cases, those who are invited to give evidence do so first in written form and then some people come and give evidence before us as well because they feel they are contributing to something which is worth their taking part in. That is the balance that somehow has been achieved by the work of the Committee. We get benefit but they also feel that they benefit from the fact that we have listened to them and incorporated their points of view and so forth and discussed them in the course of our work.

Chairman: Lord Dubs is a former minister. He is also very much our expert on enlargement and he chairs a group known as the Accession Group.

Lord Dubs: It is now the Enlargement Group. The EU Enlargement Group is not an official committee of Parliament but it is recognised and approved by Parliament. Our concern is to inform Members of both Houses about issues concerning enlargement, both the 10 countries that joined recently and also the ones in the pipeline, particularly Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and so on. We have meetings with politicians, ambassadors and ministers from those countries. For example, just as I was coming in I had a phone call from the Romanian embassy saying could I organise a meeting with the Romanian president who is due to be here in about a week’s time. That is part of what we do. I was going to add a bit about sub-committee F to what Baroness Thomas said. We are just completing a study on immigration within the European Union and into the European Union. We have found that many of the NGOs involved in immigration policy not only are willing to talk to us or send us evidence; they want to come along. They sit where you are sitting and give us evidence and we question them. There is no lack of enthusiasm, either here or in the select committees in the Commons that are doing a different job, from organisations, businesses, NGOs, whatever to come along and try and influence us. In fact we have too many people wanting to come when we announce a study and we have to select from among those who give written evidence as to who will come and give evidence, sitting where you are sitting.

Chairman: Lord Tomlinson is a former member of the European Parliament, the Convention and a former minister.

Lord Tomlinson: Lord Grenfell mentioned about the Convention on which Lord Maclennan and I served. That gave a very good example of the working of the committee system because the legal sub-committee here, each time draft clauses were put forward by the presidium for consideration by the Convention, within the deadline time for amendments, had considered them, had produced a commentary and a critique on them and suggested drafts to the presidium’s draft amendments which had been approved by the full committee and got to Lord Maclennan and myself before the deadline for amendments. In real time on every batch of draft amendments from the presidium, we had the advice of the European Union select committee which we could table to the Convention. We were probably the only House of any Parliament that managed to do that at every stage through the Convention and got them tabled in the name of Lord Maclennan and myself, even though we did not necessarily identify exactly with every detail. We made sure that they were there and it was a very good example of how it could not only work thoroughly but also quickly.

Q4 Lord Radice: I understood that you wanted to know about a matter which I would like to know more about which is what is going to happen about the budget. As you know, there was a breakdown in July. Our own committee produced a report on this issue in June in which we said that the British rebate was justified but that it ought to be on the table if we could open up at the same time the issue of the reform
of the Common Market Agricultural Policy because they are both intimately linked together. We were clearly looking into the future because of course it was on that issue on which the negotiations under the Luxembourg presidency broke down. There were other issues too. It was not only a British debate; it was for all other Member States who did not agree down but in the end we usually get them. The select other issues too. It was not only a British debate; it show if they do not. It is not always easy to pin them Luxembourg presidency broke down. There were space in their diaries. It is considered a very poor was on that issue on which the negotiations under the inquiry, and we expect the ministers to find to find anything about it? How do you look at the future support such as, for example, the opening up of the evidence to the committee only has a quarter of an Convention and are connectable with the draft anything about it? How do you look at the future support such as, for example, the opening up of the evidence to the committee only has a quarter of an Convention and are connectable with the draft

Ms Arnold: Can you call on any minister any time you want to meet in the committee?

Chairman: We do indeed invite them to come for each inquiry, and we expect the ministers to find to find space in their diaries. It is considered a very poor show if they do not. It is not always easy to pin them down but in the end we usually get them. The select committee invites the Minister for Europe to come after each Council meeting to explain what the UK has done in the Council. We find that very helpful indeed. Generally, we are mandated to ask anybody we want to come, subject to their availability. There are no restrictions on that. It has been a long tradition that we invite the ambassador of the country about to assume the presidency or at the moment they assume the presidency to come and talk to us about what the priorities of that presidency are. That helps us a great deal also, to give us an idea of what we may be scrutinising a little later in that six month period.

Lord Maclean of Rogart: In answer to the question from Ms Dypkjaer, who I am very glad to see here, we have as she and members of her committee will know a backdrop to the government position. There is a pause for reflection which has not silenced all members of our committee who have been interested to inquire in what directions the reflection may be going. One of our members of our sub-committee, Lord Kerr, better known as Sir John Kerr perhaps to members of the Convention, has on the floor of the House raised questions about the implementation of what might be regarded as non-controversial conclusions of the Convention, or at least conclusions that enjoy such a degree of consensual support such as, for example, the opening up of the meetings of the Council to the public, an issue which has been raised on a number of occasions. There has also been a continuing discussion about the subsidiarity issues and some members of at least one sub-committee, the one chaired by Lord Radice, have recently had occasion to raise with ministers whether this period of reflection has been used creatively. There is an executive perception that the introduction of changes which flow from recommendations of the Convention and are connectable with the draft Constitution might be perceived in some quarters as cherry picking, which is not welcomed in some quarters. Behind this veil which has come down for the time being, there is a certain amount of movement.

Chairman: At COSAC, as you will recall, we were discussing the subsidiarity and proportionality check, as we call it, quite freely because the Treaty of Amsterdam Protocol is a sufficient basis for Parliaments to be able to do this, the only difference being that we do not have the sanction of the yellow card. I have always strongly resisted the notion that
to carry out coordinated subsidiarity and proportionality checks by Parliaments working together is in any way cherry picking. It is not. It is simply doing what the Amsterdam Protocol permits us to do, which has not been much done in the past.

**Q6 Lord Harrison:** I did want the opportunity to pick the brains of our colleagues from Denmark on their Folketing’s EU Information Centre. We are sometimes very conscious in the House of Lords that the reports that we make and publish are often to feed the myths of misunderstandings of the workings and policies of the European Union. I was very much taken by the idea of this EU Information Centre that you have, which attempts to give impartial advice to the citizens. I wonder if you could say a little more about it. Is it solely to citizens or is it, for instance, to the press? How successful is it? Is it deemed to be independent? Is it thought within Danish policy to be a useful tool to try and spread better understanding about the workings of the European Union? I understand it has been running now for some 11 years. I think it would be very helpful to us because I sometimes think it would be helpful if we had some similar kind of institution.

**Ms Arnold:** It was decided after the first Danish “no vote” in 1992 when we had the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty. As I am sure you all remember there was a Danish “no vote” to the Maastricht Treaty. We recognised there was a need for a solid, neutral information because we hoped that this would give a better understanding of the mechanisms of the European Union. We decided to put up this information office under the Parliament, not under the foreign ministry. This was very important because the Parliament was supposed to be neutral or at least not under the command of any government. It has been placed there ever since, directly under the Folketing. It has its own project and is deemed to be neutral. It is open to everybody who can visit the home page or the website or pick up a phone and call them. They are supposed to answer any silly question. If they cannot supply people with the material they want, they can at least tell them where to get it. They are supposed to inform on everything possible. They have now developed their information services very explicitly. I was told the other day that around 50 countries are regular visitors on their website. It is not only a Danish success; it is also a European success. They publish some booklets if they feel there is a subject that must be scrutinised or presented in a bit more depth. They have a booklet called *117 Questions About the EU*, which are the most common questions asked by everybody who approaches the information office. This booklet has been translated into all the official languages of the EU because it has been picked up by other Member States. There is very solid evidence that this is a great success and that this model of having it placed directly onto Parliament is very important because then it has the trust of being impartial. I had a visit from the civil service of the Norwegian Government some weeks ago. They told us that they were very heavy visitors on the EU information centre website because the civil servants in Norway were not members of the European Union but follow all the decisions because they are members of the EEA. They were getting all the documents from the Danish information office because it was much easier and more expedient than getting them either from their own government or from Brussels. It is a solid success and we are quite proud of it. The centre is also engaged in campaigning when we have campaigns for referenda or for parliamentary relations. In that way they do make available neutral information and material about factual decisions but they also deliver campaign material from the parties, if people call them on the phone and say, “Can you send me a handful of pamphlets from the parties?” They have an ongoing distribution of all kinds of material. It has proven a great success and we are quite proud of it. The most important thing is that it is placed directly under the Parliament and not under the government.

**Q7 Lord Blackwell:** I would like to raise the issue of subsidiarity. In doing so, maybe I could follow on and note for the record that not every member of the committee or the House was necessarily supportive of the way the Constitution was going. Given that it was rejected by a number of countries, I think part of what is going on at least in some quarters here is thinking about alternative formulations for the future of the European Union that might better reflect a Europe of nation states, at least as seen by those who are cautious. In that respect, subsidiarity is clearly one of the important concerns. Given that you have this process for looking at subsidiarity, I wonder how often you feel in your committee that you are dealing with the situation where the principle of subsidiarity is being breached by regulations and what action you feel you are able to take to defend the principle of subsidiarity.

**Ms Arnold:** We have been doing something similar to that for a number of years. We have been surveying green books and white books by either our own committee or by that committee in question which is dealing with a specific area, for instance, transport or commerce, which green books are focused on. We have that committee dealing with it and giving us an answer on the necessity of having EU regulations on this or whether we would prefer it kept on a national level. Then we usually have a committee meeting in the European Affairs Committee where we are looking into it but we can also arrange seminars and hearings.
on a broader scale where we invite experts and representatives from the stakeholders to come and give their viewpoints before we give a report. We have been watching the green books and other initiatives for some years, but now we are doing it more systematically after the Amsterdam Treaty. We have been discussing this, especially in the COSAC meetings. We are now sending new initiatives which we are informed of from the Commission to the sectoral committee that is dealing with that specific area. They are asked within a certain time to return with a report or opinion. If they do not come up with an opinion, then we take the opinion in the European Affairs Committee. Eventually, we could decide not to have an opinion and say, “We do not want to go further into it.” The Commission can just proceed and the Danish Government can come back in the decision phase. Usually we have an opinion from the committee and we deliver it directly to the Commission from the Danish Parliament and say that we have discussed it. For instance, the railway package we had some months ago. We reported back from the Danish Parliament to the Commission, “Okay. This is a very obvious area where we should make some Community regulations”, because it is a very good place to have regulation. You cannot proceed with 25 different systems on the railways. This has been quite uncontroversial but we would like very much to have some more controversial issues to discuss in the field of subsidiarity, for instance, in justice and home affairs. So, the answer is yes, we do scrutinise on the subsidiarity test and we try to make our contribution from the Parliament to the Commission.

Q8 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: On the same point, over the last year or two, on how many occasions have you found in your view that there is a significant issue of subsidiarity? Secondly, as well as communicating that to the Commission, do you also communicate it to your own government? Have they agreed with you or not? Thirdly, when you consider proposals, do you positively take a view on whether or not a subsidiarity issue arises and report that to your House of Parliament or are you silent? In other words, you only raise it if there is an issue. For example, in our own system I think I am right in saying we are silent if there is not an issue. We do not say there is a tick in the box and, “This issue does not raise an issue of subsidiarity.” If we did that, I suspect we would find that 99.95 per cent of the issues do not. Up until a few years ago there was a suspicion in parts of this country that it would be quite the other way round. Could you respond?

Ms Arnold: I have been involved in all the different topics being discussed but we do not have statistics of the information from the Parliament to the government about our feelings about a certain area on the subsidiarity question. We had a green book some years ago where our scrutiny in the Danish Parliament resulted in a report to the Commission where we said we did not feel this should be a field for common regulation because we felt it was unimportant. We could easily live with a national regulation. I cannot remember the exact topic but I remember we said, “Why not just proceed at national level?” We are asked as a Parliament to report to the Commission and it is up to the Commission to find out whether they will have feedback from all the Parliaments that they should not proceed with this line.

Ms Dybkjaer: We are in subsidiarity discussions, not only in white and sometimes green books but also it is laid down, indirectly at least, when we are discussing the actual proposals. Where we say, “This should not be regulated on a Union level”, there could be a framework but it should not be regulated in detail. We also have on overview check on how the legislation is in general. Let me take something which is important for Danish society and politicians, which is the legislation within the field of environment. A couple of years ago we asked the government to give us a note from the Danish Parliament to the Commission, “Okay. This is a very obvious area where we should make some Community regulations”, because it is a very good place to have regulation. You cannot proceed with 25 different systems on the railways. This has been quite uncontroversial but we would like very much to have some more controversial issues to discuss in the field of subsidiarity, for instance, in justice and home affairs. So, the answer is yes, we do scrutinise on the subsidiarity test and we try to make our contribution from the Parliament to the Commission.

Q9 Lord Goodhart: I wanted to ask whether your committee has concerned itself with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. There are questions about what status it now has in the absence of the Constitution. Ms Arnold: We have concerned ourselves with the contents of the Charter. We had it before in the Amsterdam Treaty as a political agreement but it was incorporated into the Constitution and should have immediate judicial consequences. We had some
problems with it during the finishing of the Constitutional Treaty because it created a sort of competition with the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights. We found that the final solution would make it liveable, to have both the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Human Rights Convention, but we were very aware of the conflicts between the two systems. Perhaps we could say that the present status of the Constitutional Treaty solves a problem for us in a way.

**Q10 Lord Bowness:** What difficulties do you have, if any, with scrutinising the CFSP and have you any suggestions as to how it might be done because the main point of my sub-committee is addressing how many of the political decisions are made before we get to the stage of the formal decisions. The formal decisions are uncontroversial although there is not a lot that can be done about it. This is perhaps not a problem or an issue given Denmark’s particular position but it is hard to see how we can come to the same kind of accommodation with the Ministry of Defence that we have with the Foreign Office, certainly on ESDP matters. Perhaps they are not as accustomed to parliamentary scrutiny in their areas of activity as other people are.

**Ms Arnold:** In CFSP, we have something different from the normal legislation measure of the European Union because it is not part of the common policy. It is a specific pillar, as it is now, and there is unanimity. We have special arrangements. We discuss it with our foreign minister and also sometimes with our defence minister but they have other committees in Parliament with which they have to talk. We have a foreign affairs committee and a defence committee. It is not considered purely EU Affairs Committee business because we have demands for unanimity and also a specific arrangement not under normal Community affairs.

**Lord Dubs:** I remember when I was on the Environment Sub-Committee I went to your conferences you organised about three or four years ago on agriculture. The countries that were against the CAP turned up and the pro-CAP countries did not turn up, which I suppose is politics. My question is slightly different but related to that. There is a lot of work that goes on by your committee and our committee and there are similar committees doing different degrees of work in all the EU Member States. Do you feel that we are all doing this too independently of each other or do you feel we have the necessary level of collaboration so that we are not all doing the same thing, duplicating the work we do?

Secondly, what sort of relationship do you have with the European Parliament in terms of what the European parliamentary committees are doing that parallels the work that you do?

**Ms Arnold:** We all agree that we should communicate and see each other more in the parliamentary committees all over Europe. The COSAC meetings are very useful for that. We have also been participating in some of the joint meetings with the European Parliament and delegations from national Parliaments. We have in Denmark regular meetings with our Danish parliamentarians in the European Parliament so we try to have a lunch on what is going on in those different circles. There are many Parliaments in the Member States who do not have this analysing work which you have. I think you are doing tremendous work. I think you should be really proud of it and the more you can participate in the meetings we are going to have together the better.

**Ms Dybkjaer:** We need more inter-parliamentary cooperation. Involving Parliament is not only the responsibility of the European Parliament but it is very much up to the national Parliaments. All the subjects, EU and internal affairs, are now interconnected—take, for instance, environment, trade or agriculture or whatever. I think it should be the various parliamentarians working within the specific policy area who should be meeting with each other. We do something on environment for old traditions. In this field we have better cooperation than in other fields but, for instance, for the moment the inter-parliamentary cooperation on justice and home affairs has failed. That is a problem. In CFSP, we in Denmark have a special situation: our opt-out. We hope we can get rid of this opt-out but we are not sure, we are trying to get a referendum on it or press the government to call for one.

I think, in general, it is important that national parliamentarians work with European matters in general. We have 10,000 national parliamentarians within EU 25 plus and I think it is important that all these parliamentarians get involved in their fields. Research has also to do with European research. It is the only way to handle this and more cooperation is needed.

**Chairman:** Thank you and your colleagues very warmly for being with us. It has been most helpful and useful and we take very much to heart what you say about parliamentarians communicating with each other. This has been a good example of how and why it should be done and we look forward to meeting with you again at some stage. There are another 9,995 of you but I am very glad we started with you five. Thank you very much.
EU LEGISLATION—PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE SCRUTINY ROLE OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS

TUESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2005

Present

Dubs, L
Grenfell, L (Chairman)
Neill of Bladen, L
Radice, L

Renton of Mount Harry, L
Thomas of Walliswood, B
Tomlinson, L
Woolmer of Leeds, L

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Mr Tommy Waidelich, Chairman, European Affairs Committee of the Swedish Parliament, Social Democrat, Mr Carl B Hamilton, Deputy Chairman, Liberal, Mr Fredrik Olofsson, Social Democrat, Ms Eva Arvidsson, Social Democrat, Mr Lars Lindblad, Moderate Party, Ms Annelie Enochsson, Christian Democrat, Mr Sven-Erik Sjöstrand, Left Party, Mr Agne Hansson, Centre Party, Mr Leif Björnlof, Green Party.

Q11 Chairman: May I begin by welcoming you very, very warmly to Westminster, to the House of Lords Select Committee. It is very good of you take the time in a busy schedule to come and meet with us. I am afraid we are a bit thin on the ground today for two reasons: one is that one of our sub-committees, the sub-committee dealing with economics, finance and trade—European of course—is actually meeting at the moment, but their chairman is due in any moment to lead the discussion on the financial perspectives; I hope he will not be long delayed. Secondly, a more domestic matter, today is the day of the memorial service in Westminster Abbey for our late prime minister Ted Heath, and quite a lot of our serving members who served in his government or in his party are attending that, so I apologise for the fact that we are rather few on the ground. However, I assure you that the quality will not suffer, even if the quantity is a little less than usual. It would be appropriate, so that we do not lose time, and since Lord Radice is not yet here from his committee, if we slightly change the order. We have agreed with you on four topics: Financial Perspectives (a very hot topic at the moment); the Services Directive (another very hot topic); Reform of the Sugar Regime and then “Communicating Europe”. Since we have just under 15 minutes for each of these items we should not wait for Lord Radice to come to introduce financial perspectives, we will get him to do that when he arrives a little later, but we will start off with Lord Woolmer. Lord Woolmer, on my left here, chairs Sub-Committee B which deals with the internal market, and he and his committee have recently produced a good report on the Services Directive, which has already been debated in the Chamber. If you would like to make an opening statement, please go ahead.

Mr Waidelich: First of all, thank you very much for receiving us and spending your valuable time with us, we do appreciate that. I also want to take the opportunity to thank you for the last COSAC meeting in London last month, for a well-organised meeting and for the professional way in which you chaired the meeting. We are eager to hear from you, I suppose you are going to make some statement.

Chairman: Thank you for your kind words. You flatter me too much, but I certainly enjoyed chairing that meeting and we got something good from it. Thank you very much indeed for that. Lord Woolmer will do a brief introduction to this issue.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Thank you, My Lord Chairman, good morning everyone. I will not go through the Services Directive because you will know it just as well as we do, but I will just say a few things if I may about how we view this, and then it will be extremely helpful to hear from you how these matters are viewed by parliamentarians in Sweden.

Chairman: I am sorry, I am going to interrupt you, because I know Lord Radice has to leave at 10.30.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: I will recommence at that point.

Chairman: We need to finish this item at twenty past, so without further ado I will ask Lord Radice, who chairs the sub-committee dealing with economic and financial affairs and trade, who has done a report on the financial plans, to say a few introductory words to this particular item.

Lord Radice: Thank you. We produced a report in the summer on this very controversial issue, and if I could summarise it in a very few words what we basically said was that the British rebate—or as the French call it the British “cheque”, is justified, but that if the Common Market agricultural policy were put on the table for further reform, we would then have to put our rebate on the table as well, and in a sense that was precisely the negotiating tactic that the British Government followed. You may say that it then led to a breakdown in June under the Luxembourg Presidency, which it did, and now under the British Presidency the British are trying to find out whether there is the basis for an agreement on the budget issue, the future financing for the next seven years. When we asked the European Minister in front of us he said it was possible to have a deal, although it is interesting to hear that recently the Foreign Secretary said that a deal would be extremely
difficult. Certainly, anything that has come out of France has not made a deal more likely, so we will just have to see what happens. That is a very, very short introduction.

Chairman: Avoiding some of the pitfalls, that is very good.

Lord Radice: I think I have put myself firmly in the pitfalls!

Q12 Chairman: Would any of you like to say something about this? We are on the record, but please be frank and tell us what you really think.

Mr Hamilton: I am the vice-chairman of this committee and the committee scrutinises the government, if nothing else because the government in Sweden is a minority government so it has to secure a majority for its decisions on the European Union. On the financial perspective area it is not difficult at all to reach a majority. In fact, as you know, Sweden belongs to the one per cent club, we want to have reform of the CAP, we want to have reform of the structural funds going to the East rather than to Western Europe, more on research and development and less on agriculture. We want to get rid of the British rebate of course, as do the other 24. On these positions, I should say, there is 95 per cent agreement.

Q13 Lord Radice: In the Parliament?

Mr Hamilton: In the Committee and also in the Parliament. The Swedish government in fact is rather locked in by Parliament on these positions. He (referring to Mr Waidelich) is representing the government, I am representing one of the opposition parties, but on this there is a majority. Let me go on to discuss a trade between reducing the rebate, and agriculture a reduction of support to which in a way technically is to negotiate the future size of the rebate, and you can nail down a reduction into euros. But how do you define the reform of the CAP in the future, making sure that it is really a binding agreement to reduce the CAP i.e. if you construct a trade between the British rebate and a reform of the EU’s agricultural policy? How do you define such a binding commitment for the reform of the CAP, because that is what is needed, not an obscure commitment to some vague reform in the future?

Lord Radice: That, of course, is the problem, and it is clear that the French, in advance of the presidential elections, are not very likely to give anything other than a very obscure commitment to put it on the table. This is the difficulty that we now face to get an agreement.

Q14 Chairman: Lord Radice will correct me if I am wrong, but one of the ways forward as the British Government saw it would be if a review of the budget, and in particular of the CAP payments within the budget, were to be seriously reviewed in 2009, but with the understanding that there would be no financial impact until 1 January 2014. If there was an understanding on that, that would be very helpful to us, but at this stage I do not know to what extent that is going to be acceptable. We certainly do not want to wait until 2014 before we discuss the future of the of the CAP and the purpose and shape of the budget for the following perspective after that; you have to start thinking about that and coming up with the framework for it as early as 2009, but with the understanding that it will have no financial impact, obviously, until 2014. Is that a view that is shared by our Swedish colleagues?

Mr Waidelich: We are very eager to have a quick reform, but of course we know the circumstances and the most important thing is that we have agreement. If we can reach that during the December summit we would be very happy, but once again we have our demands for one per cent, which is the hardcore, and also for reform of the CAP and a reduction in the British rebate. I know that this will be a very tricky question to resolve in the British Presidency, but we hope that you will succeed.

Chairman: Lord Tomlinson.

Q15 Lord Tomlinson: My Lord Chairman, one of the problems that there is about reform of the rebate is that the rebate or, to give it its proper title, the British rebate of course, as do the other 24. On these demands for one per cent, which is the hardcore, and also for reform of the CAP and a reduction in the British rebate. I know that this will be a very tricky question to resolve in the British Presidency, but we hope that you will succeed.

Chairman: Lord Tomlinson.
the Netherlands and Germany have as well. This has a very big domestic impact on our population; they think, frankly, that we pay too much and get too little back, and that is an important factor. I also think that there is another thing that we have to take into account concerning this budget, apart from a limited budget and CAP reform, and that is that we have to create a modern budget, with less of the old European policies.

Q16 Lord Radice: Exactly. Mr Lindblad: The CAP is one part, the structural fund is another one, especially structural funds to the southern part of Europe and not to the new parts of Europe that actually need more of the funds. We also need to have more research and these kinds of things that the EU can contribute in addition to the national budget.

Lord Radice: The Committee is very much in agreement with that position. We share the view of the Sapir committee that the budget, as it is presently constituted, is really an historic relic and it is not attuned to the modern needs of the European Union. It does need to be recast, but to recast it you have got to tackle the issue, eventually, of the CAP.

Q17 Chairman: Could I ask you two brief questions on this? I noticed in the Financial Times yesterday there was a report—and I do not know whether it was accurate or not—which said, with reference to the budget: “Other EU countries are also sceptical about Britain’s new proposals. At an ambassadors’ meeting last week Sweden, which is concerned about mounting EU expenditures, said it did not want to agree anything before Britain had proposed the total size of the budget.” When it says “the total size of the budget” I am presuming that you are very clear on your one per cent.

Mr Waidelich: Yes.

Q18 Chairman: That, as far as you are concerned, dictates the size of the budget. One question I would be interested to know is, were you mandating your government representative to say that, because it is interesting to us how parliaments are actually able to mandate governments on a specific point like that. The second question I would like to ask you is this: we know that Sweden is opposed to the so-called shock absorber fund that has been proposed. Is this because you feel that it would tend to reward countries that should have restructured and did not, which would be unfair to the others who had, or is it simply because it means that it would cost money and it would be hard to accommodate within the one per cent?

Mr Waidelich: To start with the first question, we gave the government a clear mandate that the most important thing for us is the one per cent limit, and if they want to touch that they have to come back, if they want to go beyond that. This is the clear mandate from the Committee.

Q19 Chairman: I am feeling rather envious! Mr Waidelich: The second question I will leave to my colleague.

Mr Hamilton: We are opposed to the shock absorption fund for several reasons. The first one is why should we pay twice? We have national assistance for taking care of problems in the labour market, people who have become unemployed. Secondly, if you have become unemployed it does not really matter to you as someone who is unemployed whether you have become unemployed because of the Chinese or because of technical changes and new products; the reason for your unemployment is unimportant, it is the fact that you are unemployed which is the problem that one should focus on. We focus on that, hopefully, through our national assistance systems and we do not want to pay twice to an EU system. Also, as you have indicated, we do not want to prop up industries in countries where adjustment is not taking place. You could say there is really a difference between large and small countries in the European Union. We, as a small open economy, have really no chance to prop up industries in the way larger countries can do, with a large home market. We tried for a few years to save our textile industry and the shipyard industry etc, but after four or five years they disappeared. The shoe industry as well, we have not had a shoe industry for the last 30 years. In fact the suggested “globalisation fund” would mean a subsidy also to large countries from the small countries.

Chairman: I know the French were hoping that it would be helpful to Hewlett Packard because of the huge lay-offs in France, but that is clearly an example of misuse of the fund, if there was such a fund.

Lord Renton: Thank you, chairman. I apologise that I was a few minutes late arriving. Could I come back to the question of reform of the budget and the associated reform of CAP and Lord Tomlinson’s position? I chair our sub-committee on agriculture and the environment, and in June we produced a report on possible reform of the CAP, just before the summit meeting at which everything went wrong of course. Whilst many of us would support the general idea of one per cent of GNI only for the next six or seven years of the EU, the more one went into where the CAP monies were going to, the more one was worried about a more limited budget.
From conversations between Chirac and Schroeder years ago, the Brussels ceiling and so forth, the main item in CAP, Pillar 1, is protected in effect for the next six or seven years, but then there is Pillar 2, which covers the whole question of rural development, for which there is no figure at all yet established. From the oral evidence we took, for example, from Poland, Slovenia and Romania, it was to Pillar 2 particularly that they were looking for help, because in essence they have got really antiquated farms, often of not more than one or two hectares each. This is where they wish to modernise, this is where they wish to create new jobs. The only money that could come to them from this is almost certainly from Pillar 2, and if you do have one per cent of GNI, rather than the 1.14 that the Commission wants, the pressure will fall on Pillar 2 and the rural development funding. I did speak for a moment of the new entrants, one will find that they are extremely disappointed at not getting the help with modernising their agriculture that they are expecting. This was a real paradox to us in our Committee, we could not see a solution to it in the present state of the argument.

Q20 Chairman: Thank you. Are there any comments from our Swedish colleagues?
Mr Waidelich: I suppose you are referring to the debate about the structural funds.

Q21 Lord Renton of Mount Harry: It is the Pillar 2 side of the CAP which only takes about 20 per cent of the money, Pillar 1—which in essence is now not crop subsidy but what here we call the single farm payment—is 80 per cent of CAP, and the Brussels ceiling in a sense guaranteed that proportion of the CAP, and we have on our committee four big farmers who very much depend on that single farm payment in the years ahead, but accept that it would have to go after 2013, unlike the Agricultural Committee of the European Parliament which I do not think has accepted that yet. Our worry was about Pillar 2 which is devoted to what is loosely called rural development, for which there is no guaranteed money at all at the moment, yet that is where, as I say, the 10 new members are looking for help. I do not know what your thoughts are on this. We are, of course, a major farming country still—everybody always talks about the massive subsidies going to French farmers but there are some pretty massive subsidies going to British farmers too.
Mr Waidelich: This is an example where we have to have reform of the CAP. The present proposal means that almost 80 per cent of the agricultural subsidies go to Western Europe—old Europe as you could call it—and when you are talking about structural funds, half of it goes to old Europe. This is why we want to change it within the CAP and also in the structural funds. I do not know whether some of my colleagues want to make any comments on that.

Mr Hamilton: We cannot really reply to you specifically on this, but our view is that if this is particularly a difficult problem for the East European countries, that is a very strong incentive for them to support us in the general direction of reform of the CAP. I am not quite sure whether you are saying to us that in order to save big farms in Britain we should support the East European farmers.

Lord Renton of Mount Harry: I was not talking about the single farm payment at all, I was talking about the second half of what is called technically the Pillar 2, which is not subsidy to the big farms, it is entirely about rural development, agri-environmental schemes, improving the environment as you improve your agriculture etc. It is not about the major subsidies to big farmers, that is a different question.

Chairman: One final short question from Lord Tomlinson, and then we must move on to our next topic.

Q22 Lord Tomlinson: It is just that I want to look at the other side of the budget here. During the convention on the future of Europe your former deputy prime minister and myself put in a joint paper to the Convention advocating seriously increased powers for the European Parliament in relation to control of the budget, particularly looking at the revenue side, because there is so much fraud that takes place on the own resources side. Is that an area of the budget that your committee has ever looked at, and have you come to any conclusions?
Mr Waidelich: We have not in that sense, but we have a system where once a year our members of the Court of Auditors attend a meeting, and then we have a discussion. It is like a scrutiny, or whatever you call it, but talking about own resources, that has not been a demand from the Committee.

Chairman: We could probably go on for another hour discussing this very interesting topic, but we do have some others we want to get to. In closing this off I would thank Lord Radice—I am afraid he had to go to chair his committee—and I leave you with this thought: that if there is no new German government in place by the end of December, is there going to be an agreement anyway? Let us go back to the very patient Lord Woolmer and have him re-launch the discussion on the Services Directive.

Q23 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: I will just say a few words about how we have looked at this and how we saw this, and it would be extremely helpful to us to understand how these matters are viewed in Sweden. I suppose our starting point as a single market
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Mr Tommy Waidelich, Mr Carl B Hamilton, Mr Fredrik Olovsson,
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Committee was and is that we have all between us managed to create a single market in goods more or less over the last 50 years, and services in many areas is seriously lagging behind. A few years ago everybody was agreed that there should be a single market in services, even the European Parliament were enthusiastic supporters of it until events, as it were, occurred. We looked at this in our committee in detail a few months ago and produced a report in June or July, and it was debated on the floor of the House a few weeks ago. Our position is agreed across all parties and we are very strongly in favour indeed of the proposals under the Services Directive. We have been somewhat horrified at the coalition of interests, both on the labour side and some business interests, who seem to us to have hijacked a number of areas of argument and sought to hold it up. We think we understand many of those concerns but we really do feel that they are very largely misplaced, and we are clearly, like you, watching with great interest what is going to happen in the European Parliament Single Market Committee on 22/23 of this month and subsequently in the European Parliament. Clearly, everybody now, even the European Parliament, appears to agree that it has got to be a horizontal framework directive; our concern is that it is just possible that if the number of exceptions start to grow, the directive could finish up in a position where there are more restrictions than there are at present under the ruling from the European Court of Justice—it is really quite possible that that could happen.

Country of origin seems to us to be a very important part of flexibility and service provision, and a number of concerns to us are met by the derogations already proposed in the directive, and a number of other concerns which are expressed about the single market in goods would imply that they would not buy goods from Poland because Polish workers get paid less than they do in Britain. These are the type of arguments where, if you tried to bring the single market in goods in there, you would have people arguing you cannot do it because of these differences. It seems to us that if people meet the acquis—the acquis is critical here—and the acquis meets all the necessary conditions to be a member of the Union, then it seems to us that that is a basis upon which Member States should be able to participate fully in trade as well as in other things. You will gather that across the parties in our House it is something on which we real feel quite strongly; obviously, we keep an eye on these things and we are aware that certain issues have arisen in your own country, so it is with particular interest that we welcome the chance to hear from you today how these matters are seen by yourselves.

Mr Waidelich: Thank you. We would say that here we are quite divided, so I will talk about the government and the majority of the Parliament. We are quite concerned when it comes to the principle of country of origin; we are more in favour of the Posted Workers Directive in Sweden and I do not know if you are familiar with the Vaxholm case. We had a case in Stockholm where we had Latvian carpenters who arrived to work for lower salaries and in conditions that were lower than in Sweden, and this is a very important principle for the Swedish government and the majority of Parliament too, to save what we call the collective agreements that we have to settle the conditions in the labour market. If we can keep that we are very much in favour of free trade in services, we think it would be very good and beneficial for all of us. This is our main concern, about the labour market conditions and our system with the collective agreements. The problem for us is that lately we had a visit from Commissioner McCreevy, who was arguing against the Swedish model, against this collective agreement, and this caused a lot of discussion within the Swedish society. I will say that something that could cause us problems with a European issue and Swedish opinion towards Swedish membership is this kind of threat towards the Swedish model and the Swedish collective agreements, but I know there are other members who have other views.

Mr Hamilton: We have roughly the same view as you have. To try and explain the Swedish way, we have a certain way of organising our labour market which is based on collective bargaining agreements—there is no legislation about minimum wages and the State is not interfering with these collective bargaining agreements with minimum wages. The trade unions want to have the right in the collective agreement to go beyond and somehow define the minimum wage, but we say that there is a minimum wage which is defined somehow because of the Posted Workers Directive, and that is the basic wage. It is a very complicated issue, but we are more in favour of trade and services than the Social Democrats and the trade unions who are linked to the government, and the basic conflict is about remuneration of workers who are working, not permanently but somehow more temporarily in Sweden. There are a lot of definitions and misuse here, but that I think is the broadest. I do not know if you would like to supplement that with a comment.

Mr Lindblad: I totally agree with Mr Hamilton. I can also add that what I think would be very sad is if we have a Services Directive that considers only parts of the market for services, for example, opting out sectors of general interest and that kind of issue. In many senses the Swedish system, concerning for instance health care, is very different from the British system, it is mainly owned by the public sector, but I think that these kind of services, for a small country...
like Sweden, could be a possibility for growth in the coming years and the Services Directive could be, for a small country with a lot of big services sectors, could be an advantage. Actually, I think that the Swedish government should work for a wider one. Having said that, we also have to consider that we should have the possibility to keep our model in the system anyway, because I do not think that we should in Brussels regulate the labour market, as both Mr Hamilton and Mr Waidelich said. We could benefit, therefore, from a wider and deeper services directive.

Chairman: Would any of my colleagues like to add anything?

Q24 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: That is extremely helpful. I should explain that I am on the government side here, on the Labour front benches, so I can well understand the views that you express, and each country is perfectly able to and does have its own model that relates, for example, to conditions of employment, the labour market, and even on services of general non-economic interest. The challenge is to ensure that that consists of two things: one, seeking to maximise the benefits of the single market—after all, if you cannot produce a single market, what is it going to do, and if we cannot do that, we are really in trouble, if we set our face against that. It is a problem to overcome, it seems to us, rather than something that we call a show-stopper. It is not something that stops us doing things, it is a question of how do we meet those concerns. The same is true for services of general interest—each country has a different view about which of its public services it wishes to produce itself, has its own hospital staff, its own social care for the elderly staff, whereas other countries have a model where they provide services to people free but they are actually produced by private enterprise. If people want to do that, that is fine, but it seems to us that the news we hear that all services of general interest, including services of general public interest, might be left out of the directive would be a terrible mistake. It is saying that because one country has one social model, everybody has got to have that, but if people want to have flexible markets and responsive markets they should be allowed to do so. On the Posted Workers Directive which—for those of my colleagues who are not involved in it—effectively says that if you are employed in a business that goes abroad into another Member State to do business on a permanent basis, then the conditions that you must offer your employees must be the same as those that meet the conditions in the country you are going into, a company could not go off into Poland and employ people on absolutely different conditions to Polish workers. The Directive makes it absolutely clear that the country of origin principle when those matters are concerned, so it seems to us that those issues are met. What I think I heard from you is that there are differences of view, but on the government’s side the concern is very largely that to do with the operation of the labour market, labour agreements, rather than other issues. I did not hear from you that you are concerned to try and exclude all services of general interest, and in this country some of the trade unions have opposed the directive partly on the grounds—and this is an interpretation, not what they would say—that the public service area is where trade unions are strong in this country and they are very worried that the Services Directive might introduce competition in a number of areas of public services and that might free up the market and weaken trade unions. Is that a concern in Sweden?

Mr Waidelich: Our main concern, as I said, is about the collective agreements. Of course there is a debate about services of general interest, but it is mainly focused on the health care set up. We find so far that the government has not proposed any fixed position on that, and I think that if we resolve the other case, the case with the collective agreements, we probably could have quite an open position, but the only thing that we have discussed so far is the health care situation. That is all I can say.

Mr Hansson: We can of course discuss this, but I would like to declare for my part that first of all I would like to say that the representation in the Swedish Parliament is not proportionate against their representation here, we all represent different parties but the Social Democratic Party in the Swedish Parliament is much bigger than the picture you get here around the table. My party is in favour of a single market and the Services Directive and we are also in favour of the collective agreements. We think that the labour market agreements in Sweden will be okay when people from other countries come and work in Sweden, and I also would like to say we have had in Sweden and also I think in some other Member States a debate about what we call social dumping, where people from other countries come and work temporarily in the country and then can stay there and also take a part in the social subsidies. We cannot see that is so, that is why we think it is important to incorporate the wider services this way. The debate we have is to make the co-operation in the European Union not wider but sharper.

Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. Lord Tomlinson, and then we will wind this one up.

Q25 Lord Tomlinson: My Lord Chairman, I am going to ask a question on this from a slightly different perspective because I am somebody who shares the sort of concern that you expressed about
public opinion earlier, how the public does not follow some of these European arguments. This is one of the cases when—and I was able to think about the Lisbon agenda—when I pick up the Barroso programme for next year, and just the titles of his proposals run to four pages, I tend to the view would it not be better if you had real political leverage with the government, such as your committee seems to have, to persuade your government to be saying to the Commission: stop doing so many new things until you have finished some of the old things. This old thing goes back to 1992, it is now 14 years old, does your committee broadly share that sort of political approach?

Mr Lindblad: Yes, we do, and we will repeat that in front of our ministers, on behalf of you as well. Of course we can see some progress because obviously the impact assessment has led to some kind of withdrawals, but it is not so huge.

Mr Lindblad: I totally agree on that again, and I also would like to add that this is one of the major problems of the EU, that the Commission usually tries to make monuments. For example, the constitution or treaty—this is another question that it was easy to make a very bad picture of because it is called a constitution, it is not called a treaty and so on. Also, on the Services Directive, the Commission made bad work of promoting it around Europe and made a lot of French workers very afraid of it.

Q26 Lord Tomlinson: If I can ask you one thing on that because you blame the Commission. I know it is easy to kick the Commission but, at the end of the day, should we not be kicking 25 governments who let the Commission do it?

Mr Lindblad: Yes, that is true.

Q27 Lord Tomlinson: That includes our own government, the government we love and support.

Mr Lindblad: That is true, but if the Services Directive is going in the wrong direction—which could happen if you have a lot of opt-outs and actually it stops a lot of services that today is possible to go over borders—then it is better to throw it away and take it branch by branch, start with a new directive or something. What I do not want is a bad services directive, it is better to throw it away.

Chairman: One last question.

Baroness Thomas of Walliswood: I must apologise for arriving late before I go any further. We are dealing with the Financial Services Directive and that is a perfect example of what you are talking about. It is a very complicated directive—I have forgotten how many amendments were put down in the European Parliament and the document we got was completely incomprehensible. However, the principle of the thing is that they want to organise every way in which financial services move around the European Union, but the people who gave evidence to us said what is the problem; the best thing, because financial systems are different in different countries, is to move into a single country—France, Poland or any other country—and start establishing subsidiary companies, or take over in a joint venture with local companies and simply behave in that market as other companies behave in that market, in exactly the same way as the Americans have come into this country with their financial services. They do not behave like American companies, they behave like British companies because they are operating in British circumstances. That seems to me a much more sensible way of getting what I think many of us are very much in favour of, which is a broad opening of markets and services without going through this immensely complicated system of directives—you must, you must not, you shall, you shall not—which is this very, very complicated document which, hopefully, we shall now get the second or third version of before us fairly soon. In principle, I think it is better to go down that other route, that is my own personal view, it is simply more practical.

Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. We really do have to move on now, I am afraid, because I want Lord Renton to have his fair share of the time on the sugar regime. Lord Renton, as I mentioned, chairs the Agriculture and Environment Sub-Committee.

Q28 Lord Renton of Mount Harry: I can be quite brief on this. My Lord Chairman, because I am not certain that it is a matter of very great interest to Sweden—you are not big growers of sugar beet.

Mr Hamilton: We are in the south of Sweden.

Q29 Lord Renton of Mount Harry: I really would like to pick up on Lord Tomlinson’s remark because this is actually an instance where Commissioner Fischer Boel is really trying to solve an old problem. It has been a problem since the 1960s, but particularly since the 1970s when we joined the EU and when we wished to protect some of the old Commonwealth producers of sugar, and she has tried to solve it. We went to see her in Brussels and my committee—we are about to produce a report on it—came to the conclusion that basically she was right in her methods and her tactics which, of course, as you know, are quite severe. She is planning to suggest that the EU institutional support price for sugar is reduced by 39 per cent—that is a big figure, except that at the moment the EU price for sugar is something like three to four times the world price, so to reduce it by 40 per cent is an important hard step—abolish compulsory buying up of surpluses, which is
part of her programme, to pay compensation to EU farmers for 60 per cent of the price cut through a decoupled payment integrated into the single farm payment. Those are the details, we have taken evidence and we are about to begin one more session of evidence tomorrow with representatives of Australia, Brazil and Guyana, the big countries who want this change. Comments come to us on the one hand from some of the European interests that it is too little, too late, and on the other hand from the ACP countries who are protected under the sugar protocol that it is too much too soon. Therefore, you do think goodness, it must be difficult to be an EU agricultural commissioner, what a life. We think basically that she is on the right lines, but whether the agricultural commissioner, what a life. We think sugar, there are a lot of sugar farms—

Mr Tommy Waidelich, Mr Carl B Hamilton, Mr Fredrik Olovsson, Ms Eva Arvidsson, Mr Lars Lindblad, Ms Annelie Enochsson, Mr Sven-Erik Sjöstrand, Mr Agne Hansson and Mr Leif Björnlod

8 November 2005

Mr Sven-Erik Sjöstrand, Mr Lars Lindblad, Ms Annelie Enochsson, Mr Sjo¨strand:

Q30 Lord Renton of Mount Harry: As sugar beet growers?

Mr Lindblad: As sugar beet. There are a lot of sugar farms in the most southern constituencies and I have a lot of discussions with the farmers, also the head of the sugar farmers is living in my constituency and they are supporting a change because they understand that this a part of the agricultural sector that has not been reformed ever, so I totally agree with the situation there, they are heavily subsidised by the price. Today their major concern is that they want to have compensation, and they want the compensation to not go to the whole rural sector but to the farmers who lose their subsidies. That is partly of course a domestic issue as to how we create compensation inside Sweden, but it is a major concern to them that they get the compensation rather than all farmers. There have been some differences between some parties as to how fast we should go with changes to the sugar sector, but we totally agree on it and our view is that we should be more proactive in the WTO process because the present situation is that the EU is organised by the WTO and we should be more proactive and take part to deregulate world markets. That is the standpoint I would have.

Mr Lindblad: My constituents have a lot of interest in sugar, there are a lot of sugar farms—

Q31 Lord Renton of Mount Harry: That is very interesting, thank you.

Mr Sjöstrand: We are from the same region, also in the south of Sweden, and I too have had discussions with the sugar farmers and they do want a change with the sugar regime. Some of them are saying that it is too quick, this reform, and then we have the concentration, we have in the south of Sweden Skäne, we have two islands in the Baltic Sea where we produce sugar and I think it would be very difficult to produce sugar in our two big islands in Sweden, we would have a concentration in the south.
Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. Since you have been kind enough to say that you could stay for just a few more minutes we should have a very brief discussion on “Communicating Europe”. It had been our intention that we might also discuss the REACH Directive, but time is very limited.

Lord Renton of Mount Harry: Fortunately, there is not much happening on it.

Q32 Chairman: I do not know whether any of our Swedish colleagues have anything very brief they want to say about this, we could give it a minute or so. It deserves more than that, but, Tommy.

Mr Waidelich: Very briefly, we appreciate your intention to put this question forward but we are unhappy about the Commission’s informal proposal. We appreciate the British Presidency and your proposals.

Lord Renton of Mount Harry: It is a huge problem of definition, is it not, and actually what should be covered by the REACH proposal and what not. There is tremendous argument about it and I think there is great worry about the bureaucracy that might follow from it too. It will move forward, but I think at a snail’s pace.

Q33 Chairman: Good. We have to move forward, if not at a snail’s pace, because we have just a few more moments left and I would like to say a word and ask a question on the subject of “Communicating Europe”. This Select Committee will shortly be embarking on an inquiry around the theme of communicating, and of course it is a very, very wide topic and we want to try and focus this inquiry, largely to look at ways and means in which parliaments can communicate with their people on matters concerning the European Union. We read with enormous interest your document describing the work of your European Union Information Centre. We do not have anything quite like that here in the United Kingdom, and the whole subject of communicating Europe with government funds is extremely controversial in this country. The Government in fact decided that it would be inappropriate to take any European Union funding to help explain the constitutional treaty, that was tantamount to taking sides in a very, very difficult political debate, but we nonetheless are aware of the fact that people need to know what is going on in the European Union. We would very much like to know whether you feel that the arrangements that you have meet with the approval of the people, whether they find it useful, or are there any areas in which the amount of money or the effort that you are putting into this attracts hostility on the grounds that it appears that you are selling the European Union with government money to try and persuade people who may take a more euro sceptic view. We would like to hear your comments on how you see this working.

Mr Waidelich: Our arrangement is with neutral bodies who are objective, and we do not receive any money from the European Union because we have the same situation as you, it would be considered as something strange, that they want to change our minds. The problem is that if we have too much money it can also cause problems, because our experience from our last referendum about the euro shows that the Yes side have a huge amount of money, but the reaction from the people was the opposite because they were saying “Why are they trying to buy us, what are they doing?” The most important thing to convince people to be more positive towards Europe is to show results. People in Sweden believe that the Union has a lack of results, it has to deliver in important areas such as environmental policy and so on. What we have to do as well is to convince our governments to be proactive in reporting on important areas.

Ms Enochsson: I am a member of the Christian Democratic Party and as a party we are very pro-EU, the party leaders and so on, but we have a problem with the voters, and there are some in our party, like me, who are not that positive. Why? It is because of the lack of results and it is a difficult issue. You said you have to communicate Europe to the voters, to the people, thinking that they do not know, that if they had knowledge they would be more positive. I would say if you are a little more sceptical you must have a lot of knowledge to know why, so I am not sure that it helps to give a lot of money to change the people’s minds, the only thing that actually can change is to make it smaller and sharper and only focus on the things that the EU shall do and not its spend over time.

Chairman: Thank you very much. Lord Neill.

Q34 Lord Neill of Bladen: How ambitious is your information committee? Does it, for example, carry information about leading decisions of the European Court of Justice, does it carry information about proposed new directives or framework decisions? Does it go to that length, would the public in Sweden be able to find out what is being proposed? Lord Tomlinson mentioned the Barroso programme: would they know what is in the programme or what drafts are currently being considered by the Swedish Parliament or your Committee? How wide do you go?

Mr Waidelich: Not so far as you are demanding but I will leave Carl to comment.
Mr Hamilton: We have an information centre linked to the Parliament, and that has proved to be a good idea because it is looked upon as more impartial, rather than if it was under the government itself. That has worked well and it is used to a large extent by schools for education purposes, but also students who study political science. On your question of how far they can help you, if you could define the directive you would certainly get it from them, perhaps after a day or two, or a link to a website, the same with the Court of Justice material. They are quite professional and advanced in the help at all levels, but as a citizen you would have to be able to define what you actually want, you could not just say give us 10 arguments for and against the European Union, you would have to be more specific.

Mr Waidelich: They are more reactive than proactive. We also have a committee appointed by the Government called the EU 2004 Committee. It was set up to inform about the constitutional treaty, the European Convention, and this committee is a little bit more proactive and tries to arrange meetings around Sweden as well to give information to the public in other ways.

Chairman: One last brief questions from Lord Dubs, and then we had better let you go.

Q35 Lord Dubs: It is very interesting what you have got here about your information centre. How do you judge whether it is successful or not?

Mr Hamilton: Parliament is the website and it is linked to the information centre. They have very many visitors to their website, so that is one way. What you also asked was whether it is controversial; it is not controversial, it is not an issue in the public debate that this information centre is taking a leftist view or an anti view.

Q36 Lord Dubs: I was not suggesting that; we are struggling to find ways of educating British people and informing them about the EU—Britain has probably the least informed public in the EU—and I am just wondering how successful this is. Do you know whether it is working?

Mr Lindblad: I do not think the Swedish population is more informed generally than the rest of Europe, but as a measure we can say that there is a lot of interest from the schools. A lot of schools do see this information centre as a tool. They can get different kinds of materials like brochures, different presentations, PowerPoint presentations and so on, and also they produce sites for school work and also at academic levels. In that sense it is successful and it is not questioned by anyone either, even from the No side of the Swedish people.

Q37 Lord Tomlinson: Do people accept it as objective, because the big problem we have is that one person’s objective statement is somebody else’s propaganda.

Mr Lindblad: That is true, but on the other hand you never question the objectivity of the information from the state or the municipality or the region, in Sweden at least. If we start to focus on the EU at another level in the national decision system, I think we could go through that issue. I do not think the population see it as propaganda.

Q38 Chairman: We have to let you go, I am afraid, because we have already gone 11 minutes over the allotted time and you have to get to the Department of Trade and Industry. Thank you very much indeed for coming and talking frankly and informatively with us, it has been of great value to us and I hope you have enjoyed your hour with us. I am sorry we did not have more time, but let us repeat this again some time in the future. Tommy, I look forward to seeing you at the next COSAC anyway.

Mr Waidelich: Thank you very much as well for your hospitality and for spending your valuable time with us.
TUESDAY 7 MARCH 2006

Present: Blackwell, L Bowness, L Dubs, L
Grenfell, L (Chairman) Hannay of Chiswick, L Harrison, L Maclennan of Rogart, L

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Norton of Louth, a Member of the House, Professor of Government, University of Hull, Lord Williamson of Horton, a Member of the House, and Baroness Williams of Crosby, a Member of the House, examined.

Q39 Chairman: Can I begin by thanking the three of you for coming to join us today for this discussion. It is a formal evidence session and it is being recorded. It is being webcast and you will, of course, be receiving an uncorrected version of the transcript for you to take a look at. It will be uncorrected on the website as well because we like to get it out on the website as quickly as possible, but, obviously, the corrected version will appear in the report. We are almost a complete team here today, as you can see, although we do have one or two peers who, unfortunately, could not be here but would like to have been here; particularly Lord Brown who Chairs Sub-Committee E and Lord Wright of Richmond who Chairs Sub-Committee F (he is away with his Committee at the moment), but otherwise we are a full house. May I begin by suggesting that unless you would like to make opening statements we might go straight into the substance of the issue because I know that time is not completely on our side. I know Lord Williamson will need to be out by 4.15 and we are likely to be interrupted by a division earlier. You have seen, I think, the brief paper we did on the areas that we would like to cover.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: I am sorry, my Lord Chairman, just responding to your decision to go straight into questions, because I was not able to submit written evidence when you asked for it (I was abroad at the time). I have actually written up what I was going to say so may I pass it round the Committee and then speak to it?

Q40 Chairman: You can speak to it if you like; we have no problem with that.
Baroness Williams of Crosby: Whatever suits you, but I am happy to do the other.

Q41 Chairman: How long would you need to take to speak to it?
Baroness Williams of Crosby: It is about three pages long.

Q42 Chairman: I think, in that case, it would be a good idea if we heard from you but what I would like to do is to reverse the order slightly because there is one issue that I want to bring out on to the table right away, which I would like Lord Norton to address, and then we will come to your statement, and that is to remind us a little of what you told us about the constitutional proprieties of what we do or, rather, what it has been suggested we do. I think that having given that due consideration, our framework will be rather better set for what we want to discuss afterwards. So with your indulgence, Lady Williams, unfortunately, could not be here but would like to have been here; particularly Lord Brown who Chairs Sub-Committee E and Lord Wright of Richmond who Chairs Sub-Committee F (he is away with his Committee at the moment), but otherwise we are a full house. May I begin by suggesting that unless you would like to make opening statements we might go straight into the substance of the issue because I know that time is not completely on our side. I know Lord Williamson will need to be out by 4.15 and we are likely to be interrupted by a division earlier. You have seen, I think, the brief paper we did on the areas that we would like to cover.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: I am sorry, my Lord Chairman, just responding to your decision to go straight into questions, because I was not able to submit written evidence when you asked for it (I was abroad at the time). I have actually written up what I was going to say so may I pass it round the Committee and then speak to it?

Q43 Lord Neill of Bladen: My Lord Chairman, I would like to ask Lord Norton to spell it out. Are you saying, putting it very crudely, any sort of
propaganda type of role, in which we are saying: “We are doing a good job and we want lots of people out there to know”, or are you saying that that is outside the remit, really, of this Committee?

Lord Norton of Louth: No, it depends on what one is disseminating. I think there are two roles: are you disseminating material on behalf of another body, which is the agency role, or are you disseminating details of what you yourself are doing as a Committee? The latter role, I think, is completely appropriate; it is what the Committee should be addressing, to look at how you push out the work that you are undertaking to a much wider audience. So my point is that what the Committee should be doing in terms of the substance of its work is what it is presently doing, not adopting a new role in substantive terms, but looking at how the work it does do is better recognised by people out there and, indeed, inviting others out there to contribute more to the existing work that the Committee does. So my view is that the Committee does work at the moment which is entirely appropriate, it fulfils its functions well, and that therefore that role should be protected and, because it is resource intensive, one needs to focus on the task in hand rather than taking on anything additional. However, in fulfilling the tasks it does, not enough people are aware of the work the Committee is doing or benefits from the work of the Committee, and I think it is a two-way relationship: ensuring that people are not only aware of what it is doing but are having some input, and that then the Committee itself is far more proactive in disseminating information about what it is doing and making sure that the good work it presently does is more widely appreciated.

Lord Renton of Mount Harry: I am extremely interested in what Lord Norton says. I find it very hard to comprehend, perhaps, the sort of restriction you worry about our activities. I see that in suggesting possible awareness of sections for discussions, my Lord Chairman, today, he does make the point that the Committee “is also mandated to consider other matters related to the European Union”. There could hardly be anything more open-ended than that. Surely, if we are mandated to do that it almost follows that it is part of our duty as custodians, in a sense, of public money to try to make it clear to as wide a public as possible what we are doing and why we are reaching the conclusions that we are. Just to give one very short instance, I, Lord Sewell from Sub-Committee D, our Clerk and one other were all in Finland last week looking at their power stations and getting their attitude on the future of nuclear energy. Why? Because there are two draft Directives lying on the table, one about nuclear safety and one about waste. Therefore, there we were in Finland learning a lot about Finland’s attitude to nuclear power. Clearly, from that, when we write a report and submit it in a month or two’s time we would like to air as widely as we can what we have found out.

Q44 Chairman: I do not think there is any problem about that, and myself I do not see an inconsistency in what you are saying, Lord Renton, and what Lord Norton is saying in expressing his preference for the second option, which is that we report on what we are doing. I think that as long as we are reporting on what we are doing, what we are saying and what we have heard we are clearly within our rights. It is much more problematic if this Committee becomes, as it were, an information agency unrelated to the work it is doing. I think we are gradually feeling our way forward, as a Committee, to the view that by extension, if the Committee, in fact, describes well and effectively the work it is doing it will, in the end, have an effect on the public because it will show that Parliament is holding the Government to account properly and is being properly informed. Would that be your view as well?

Lord Norton of Louth: Yes, it would. That is perfectly correct. If I can pick up on Lord Renton’s point, the crucial words are “to consider”: in other words, I think there has to be some value-added element provided by the Committee which is then disseminated rather than being merely a conduit for information which presently exists. If you look at the bodies that exist in Sweden or Denmark they disseminate very useful information but I cannot say that having it within the purview of the Parliament actually adds value; I cannot see that what Parliament is doing contributes to that process. That is the distinction I am drawing, so rather than seeing this merely as a conduit I say it is an agency role; the role of the Committee is to add value to consider and, having considered, to put the results of that consideration in the public domain.

Lord Williamson of Horton: Like you, my Lord Chairman, I do not see any great difficulty. Like Lord Norton, I think that the EU Committee is not acting as an agent and should not act as an agent for anybody, least of all the European Commission (that would certainly be a disaster); its job is quite simply to advise the House and, through the House, the Government and, indirectly, public opinion on the issues that it decides to take up, as Lord Renton made quite clear. For me the important point (and we are coming on to it, I think, in the first question) is what sort of issues the Committee decides to take up. That is, for me, the important thing. I will not go further than that but when we come to the questions I would like to elaborate on it.
Lord Marlesford: Could I reassure Lord Norton that he will notice that in our original terms of reference we used the perhaps slightly misleading phrase of “presenting and explaining the European Union”. We have now changed that to “public awareness and the role of the House of Lords”, with which some of us are much more comfortable.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I have no problem at all with the way Lord Norton sets out his preferred option, and it would I think be the perfect option that I would share. However, I do think that this whole debate is slightly unreal because we are all the time reviewing and scrutinising European legislation. In doing that we, first of all, have to describe the salient points of it which, of course, does hopefully promote it to, in knowledge terms, a wider range of people, and then we have to make a judgment on it and sometimes our judgment is totally positive, in which case we are undoubtedly, some people would say, conducting propaganda. It is not propaganda at all; we are just saying it is the view of this Committee that the Commission’s proposal—let us say for reforming the sugar regime—is a good proposal. Alternatively, we may say it is very bad, and we do both, but when we say it is good then of course we are doing what, on several things which this Committee might want to do. The second area which seemed to me that this Committee makes a clear indication that the Annual Work Programme defines some substantial area of the Commission’s proposal—let us say for reforming the sugar regime—is a good proposal. Alternatively, we may say it is very bad, and we do both, but when we say it is good then of course we are doing what, on the wilder shores of Euro-scepticism, would be described as propagandising for the European Commission, but I have no difficulty with the way he described how we should be doing it.

Q45 Chairman: I would like to come to Lady Williams, and hear from you, if we may.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: I will make it as condensed as I possibly can.

Q46 Chairman: Thank you very much for giving us this paper anyway.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: To start with, I took the position that the point made by Lord Norton was a very sound one; that is to say that there is a distinction between the advocacy of the European Union and the advocacy of the role of this Committee in explaining and, indeed, scrutinising what the European Union is. As I understood it, it was the settled view of this Committee that it was the second of these that we are addressing, not the first. Secondly, because Douglas Alexander’s evidence to this Committee makes a clear indication that the government is going to support the so-called Europe Direct programme of information centres and call centres, I understand throughout the United Kingdom, that role seemed to me to be largely taken up by the Government and it was not necessary for this Committee, or indeed appropriate, to duplicate it. Thirdly, however, on the other side, I have to say that I do not accept the definition in Lord Strathclyde’s memorandum because I do not think one can possibly describe the European Union and our relationship to it as being like that to another national legislature or to an international authority. Whether we like it or not, we are Members of the European Union and help finance it through our taxes; therefore, we are bound in certain limited fields by supranational legislation. So we have a much greater responsibility, in my view, for the accountability of the European Union and the transparency of the European Union to our own people than would be the case with regard to, let us say, the WTO or something of that kind—another international organisation—let alone another national legislature. I think one has to make that distinction too, because it simply is not the case that we are looking at something as detached from us as would be the case in those two descriptions. Having, therefore, ruled out the initiative for the information centre I went on to write about some of the things I thought we might usefully do. I very much agree with what Lord Renton said, that this is partly a question of what the scope of the Committee’s work is rather than whether it is advocacy or explanation. In that context, I thought, in particular that there were several things which this Committee might want to look at, and I have tried to be very concrete. The first of those is the Annual Work Programme, which I think could be debated on the floor of the House as well as by this Committee very effectively because it gives us an indication of where we are going, not just looking back at where we are. Where the Annual Work Programme defines some substantial area of new development then, it is almost the duty of this Committee to look at that and to, where necessary, refer it to a Sub-Committee for a rapid inquiry. I notice, for example, that the week before last, the Prime Minister said that he believed energy was now a suitable subject for a European Union responsibility, and that is something which, perhaps, Lord Renton’s Committee would want to look at. I very much agree with him that partly because of the dominant position of Russia in the whole field, Russia looks at the European Union as a bargaining partner, not the individual countries within it, and if we are therefore to have a sensible explanation of how we deal with Russia it is essential that something like this Committee or a Sub-Committee assists us in doing that. The second area which seemed to me that we might build up on, (because I have to say quite frankly that I am very surprised and rather disappointed by the absence of effective questioning of statements about the European Union), is that we always have a statement following each Council and very frequently the questioning is sketchy, not well-informed, not particularly effective or relevant. So that is a second area, along with the Annual Work Programme, where I think the Committee could
usefully meet to discuss at the beginning and end of a Presidency, possibly to invite senior representatives of the country holding the Presidency to say what its plans are and then to calculate how far it thinks they are effective. However, I also think that it could well enrich the whole of the discussion in this House by such a report being made available for debate in the House. The third area where I felt that this Committee could extend its remit, so to speak, would be by looking at the issue of the relationship between the Main Committee and the Sub-Committees. Here, in particular, it seemed to me that they should look together at the beginning of the Presidency and at the end of the Presidency, but then they should consider whether there are certain issues which Sub-Committees might want to give priority to. I then turned to communications and thought that the abstracts of reports and, in particular, the executive summaries of reports should be put very high on the website so that people can have access to them easily and they can run them off without having to pay for them. I thought that in that context it might be useful to think of an e-mail network of people with particular interests. I say that because I think very often a website is a passive instrument; it depends upon people trying to approach it. In some ways it is quite useful to alert people, especially very busy people, to flag up matters of particular interest to them. I agree with Lord Norton very strongly about explanatory memoranda being on the website; I think that is absolutely crucial because a lot of Directives are very hard for lay people to understand. Finally, on that section on communications, I would advocate very strongly that we should have small press launches, not for the whole of the press—most of which will not do anything about it and simply does not cover it—but more precisely specialised press launches about the work being done by a Committee or concluded by a Committee, in the area of interest to them—e.g. Lord Renton’s Committee on the subject of nuclear energy would get a very substantial interest amongst specialised media as well as the general media. In the case of the agriculture and environment committee then there is a strong interest in the farming press which might not be reflected in the general press. I think there is a lot to be said for having an exhibition of the work of the Committee in Westminster Hall, and I would suggest it might be associated with a seminar each day of the exhibition available to sixth formers coming here, with a Member of the Committee explaining in greater detail and answering questions about the work of this Committee. I think that would be a very effective instrument. Finally, and a bit more controversially, I think the Committee might discuss the possibility of an annual or biannual sixth formers’ conference addressed by people from the Committee about the whole relationship of this Committee to scrutinising and studying the work of the European Union. That is not a propaganda thing, it is an explanation thing. Last of all, and I put this very seriously to the Committee and I hope you all think about it very hard, I think there is a very strong case, if resources could be found—we are probably looking at something like £30,000—for three case studies made available to universities and institutions of education about the way in which Directives are handled as between national parliaments, the European Commission, and so on. I speak with some knowledge because I am a Professor Emeritus at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and one of its most effective., ways of teaching students is the case study. A case study can be highly objective, it does not need to be in any way propagandistic; and if I can take just one example, the Directive about tobacco and the marking or warning on the back of packets, which I am sure Members of the Committee will know actually happened through trade and not through health. Health is a national responsibility and the directive bypassed national subsidiarity, to some extent. A case study on that kind of issue can be worth 1,000 speeches, and I think it would be well worth considering, and could get very wide coverage within the university and technical institute area, and would be very meaningful I think to students. So I hope that is enough to go on with. I tried to make my suggestions as concrete as they possibly could be. The very last point of all, but again a rather controversial one, I do not know why the Committee should worry too much about expressing in its reports, and even describing, some differences of opinion within the Committee. I do not believe that needs to negate the attempt to try to get a unanimous view at the end of the day. I think it might make it more lively and more realistic because everybody knows that there are deep divisions on the subject of the European Union, but if it is described rather than advocated in a report I actually think that is not in any way objectionable; it is simply part of the democratic process which has issues and differences of opinion. At that point, My Lord Chairman, I will rest my argument.

Chairman: Thank you, and we will be coming back to you. On that very last point, I personally have a lot of sympathy. I have always found it a little difficult to digest that we have to strain ourselves to achieve a consensus and a unanimous report. We have had occasions, thankfully very rare, on which a Member has called for a division on a particular recommendation. I do not myself have any problem with that and in the cases where it has happened when I was a Sub-Committee Chairman, I think once or twice, I have not had any difficulty with it at all. I had more difficulty in calling upon the Committee to try
and paper over cracks, which sometimes can be more of a strain and stress than admitting we have got a difference of opinion and acknowledging it in the report. So I take that very much as a good point. You have covered a very broad field and I would like to get reactions from round the table to what Lady Williams has said, and solicit some more ideas from our other two witnesses.

**Q47 Lord Blackwell:** May I come back to the point that Lady Williams covered, which is the extent to which the Committee focuses on legislation as opposed to other matters? It is natural, to an extent, that big pieces of legislation coming from the EU are an automatic focus for attention and the Government needs to have our view on them, but in terms of public issues, public concerns and public awareness of the EU, a lot of the day-to-day material that is commented on in the press is not to do with major bits of legislation, it is to do with interpretations of existing legislation, decisions by the Commission, whether it is to do with tax matters or health and safety or the internal market, or, indeed, judgments of the European Court that may be seen to be extending or interpreting the legislation. I just wonder whether as part of our role there is any case for saying we should actually be more adventurous in spending more time looking at issues which are not to do with current legislation and more to do with general development of the European Commission.

**Baroness Williams of Crosby:** My own view, which is obviously my view and I would not try to ascribe it on anybody else, is that you need a balance between these two things and, if anything, the Committee has become a bit too engrossed in what are often quite detailed pieces of work while passing by some of the major issues that fall within the area, for example, of whose major responsibility it is. If I can give an example, when the Schengen group started looking at the concept of immigration and asylum policy as being a subject for a common European policy within the Schengen Group area (we excluded ourselves, of course) I think it would have been very useful to have looked more deeply into that and to see whether this seemed to be an appropriate move from a national to a supranational policy. Similarly, I feel about energy policy that unless this Committee does look at that a bit more closely it will simply sweep past us and the House will not be able to grasp some of the crucial factors that should be discussed in the way that really is of first importance. I think it is up to the Committee to strike a balance between those two things. There is obviously legislation you want to look at but, personally, my feeling is that there is a real danger in missing the big canvas by getting very engrossed in the smaller ones. In some cases it might be appropriate for the Main Committee to call upon individual Members from Sub-Committees to join them look at particular issues of a major kind in greater detail. I think that might be a reasonable thing to do from time to time. So the way I saw it was that if the Committee decided, for example, that European energy policy was something of relative importance (which, personally, I think it is) then it would fall primarily to Lord Renton’s Sub-Committee but it might be useful in some meetings of this main Committee, together with some Members of Lord Renton’s Sub-Committee and possibly one or two others drawn from the Environment Committee, to look at the policy together.

**Q48 Chairman:** Before calling Lord Hannay and then Lord Harrison, could I ask Lord Williamson, because you touched on this issue of what we select to discuss as being part of the equation and how you project that to the outside world. Can you expand a little bit on that?

**Lord Williamson of Horton:** This is the main point, for me, and I covered it in my written evidence and I have had quite a lot of experience on the EU Committee, as Chairman of one of the Sub-Committees and I know roughly how it works. I think that it is very important that we should have the two-track approach; that is to say, the examination of proposals which come forward from the Commission for legislation—they have got to be looked at properly, they have to be examined and sometimes they are very important but, often, their importance is restricted to one sector or another. So only part of the public, or even our House, is very interested in some of them, but they are important. That is one main role for this Committee. However, I am one of those who think that the Committee should take very seriously the extra bit of its mandate quoted by Lord Renton. I think it is very important that the Committee should, from time to time, take a larger subject, which is not at that moment related to a proposal for legislation, and look at that and to report to the House. It is no different in principle; it is just that you are basing yourself on the examination of policies, for example, which are in effect, how good have they been or how bad have they been, and report on that. I think it is very important because those types of reports will interest more people outside, and I personally would like to see them presented differently. I know we always go on about whether they should have lovely colours on the cover but it is important if you do a report on a major subject covering what has happened or what is happening in the Union—not directly related to legislation—then we should present it so that the public can see it is a major issue and they want to read it.
Q49 Chairman: You may or may not be pleased to hear that the Select Committee’s next inquiry is going to be into the mechanics and impact of further enlargement of the European Union. Lord Norton, would you like to add anything to what has been said so far?

Lord Norton of Louth: You will be pleased to know that there are no cracks on this side of the table that need papering over, because I am in complete agreement with what is being said. I think it is entirely appropriate that there is a need for balance. I have always looked upon the Sub-Committees as, essentially, the workhorses, looking at legislation, but it is really the role of the Select Committee to keep an eye open for the big issues, perhaps in conjunction with the Sub-Committees, and address those. I think, given the terms of reference and the expertise available to the Committee, it is ideally placed to undertake that type of inquiry. We do have the resources, between the Select Committee and the Sub-Committees, to ensure there is a balance, so that one is not actually losing out on either side. It is entirely appropriate, really, to develop what already exists. The Main Committee has looked at a broad range of topics in, I think, an entirely appropriate and very constructive way.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Firstly, could I just say that I strongly endorse Baroness Williams’ suggestion that we ought to try and do a report and have a debate every year on the Commission’s work programme. I do actually think that is one way to square this circle. We are talking about general subjects not just specific proposals for legislation, but, also, to do so in a way which would be a platform for debate about pretty well everything that is going on in the European Commission in that particular time period. So I hope that we will give further thought and reflection to that because I think it is a really excellent idea and meets one of the weaknesses being identified. Could I ask the Members of the panel at some stage to comment on this point, Baroness Williams said, the website is essentially a passive thing; it is only people who want it, who know about it, that go on to it. How do you reach out beyond that? I think that is the fundamental issue. If we address the dissemination issue some of the problems that have been identified, I think—they will not take care of themselves but I would expect they would generate far greater interest among those beyond the Committee.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: Can I add a further word to what Lord Norton said, with which I agree. I do want to reiterate that statements are a huge, unused opportunity. They are held at, almost invariably, the centre of the day; they are usually immediately after or shortly after questions when most of the House is still full. They are quite extensive if they are about the European Council—admittedly they are only going
to be two or three times a year but, nevertheless, they are quite extensive. There is an opportunity for at least 40 minutes to raise questions, some of which are front bench but not all of which are front bench, and by and large it is an opportunity which is fundamentally missed. If the Committee itself were to discuss the upcoming statement—I do not in the least take any difference from Lord Norton that it might be conceivable to give some indication of the kind of issues that the Committee feels are significant which could be raised on the statement—that really does give you an extraordinary opportunity to attract other Members of the House who are not on this Committee. The other comment about the specialised, short press launches, which would mean that a Sub-Committee’s report was made known to everybody who was interested in that subject—for example, agriculture—even though their prime interest may not be Europe, that would very substantially extend the reach of the Committee and make people much more aware of the work it is doing in their own field, which they may not realise if they do not actually belong to this Committee and follow its work very closely.

Q51 Chairman: One of the problems we face with statements after the European Council is that the statement is made by the Prime Minister in the other place, which means that it has to be made by the Leader of the House in this House. With all due respect to Leaders, they are not necessarily the front benchers who are best placed to be able to engage in detailed discussion with the House on these matters. Often the Foreign Office Minister would be a better person to do it. I say that by no means wishing to criticise the performance of any Leader of the House or any Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords, but it is a rather curious custom that it has to be made at that level rather than those who have the hands-on experience of having probably done most of the work on the Council.

Lord Williamson of Horton: I thought you might be able to shock the Chief Whip by suggesting that in some circumstances there could be a statement not related to the European Council at all but related to the conclusions of the report which is about to be published by the EU Committee. If you wanted to go even further, you could offer the possibility of repeating statements in the House of Commons.

Chairman: We are toying with the idea of drawing attention to our reports by using the starred question route, in which we might be able to draw attention to some report which is about to be published.

Lord Harrison: My Lord Chairman, we have heard some very good and fresh ideas about how we might go about our affairs. However, as you know, my concern has been that I believe that the work done within a House of Lords Committee is normally of a very high calibre and that our problem and failure has been to communicate and respond not only to our own colleagues but to the outside world in a flexible manner. I give just one example, but I could give many, and that is the report that we did on the Working Time Directive, which I believe was an excellent report and touched on many of the important points. We did the report and then, as it were, it was put on the shelf, and then in the August of that year the press and others woke up to the fact that this had enormous implications to the Health Service. My question, really, is having done all that work and brought the expertise and experience of your Lordships together to accomplish that work it should not be something that is seen to be appropriate to lie on the shelf but that we should have the mobility and flexibility to intrude into it into the public debate. For that, clearly, we need resource and we need someone who is on the beam to notice when these matters are coming up and when it might be appropriate either to take the report off the shelf or even to re-focus it so that we can intrude upon that debate and then demonstrate what I think is known to all of us on the inside, which is that the House of Lords does a lot of good work and that we would be very helpful in contributing to that national debate.

Chairman: May I ask Lord Neill and then we will go back to our witnesses.

Lord Neill of Bladen: If I could ask our witnesses whether they could comment on this; it really relates to what Lord Hannay said as to the reticence of members of the House to take part when a report comes from the European Committee orvia, originally, a sub-committee, and I wonder is that a feature of the very high standard of contributions in the House of Lords. I am a very new member, I have only been a member of the House for about eight years, but one thing that has struck me is that, with some notable exceptions, people speak of what they know about. I remember one evening in the timed debate about Indonesia there were eight or 10 people who spoke, but really nobody spoke who did not know the subject or had been there in the last six months or something like that; it was incredibly impressive. If there is going to be a report, let us say the one I have in mind is subsidiarity—we had one fairly recently, I spoke on that and almost every other participant was a member either of the Select Committee or of the sub-committee giving the report. The reason they spoke was because they were interested, they wanted to get their words out in public, but the other members of the House feel that they are not playing in the same league, they have not studied it, they have not read the supporting evidence—even if they speak to the report. In a way what we are describing is a feature of the excellence of
the House rather than a defect. Maybe the witnesses could comment on that.

**Q52 Chairman:** Maybe you could comment on both the points made by Lord Harrison and Lord Neill.  
**Lord Norton of Louth:** In response to Lord Harrison, I agree with the point he makes. One needs to distinguish when it comes to dissemination, there are two audiences, the public and what is sometimes referred to as the attentive publics. The public is where we are talking about, if you like, the educational role, making schools and others aware of what the Committee is doing so they are as much informed about the process as the substance, but the other is the attentive publics, which ties in very much with Lady Williams’ point, with which I very much agree, that you have got very specialised audiences out there and it is really picking up on the trade press and the specialist journalists and making some effort to reach those, to brief them so that they are aware, once the report comes out, of its significance, rather than waiting for somebody to pick up on it later. It is really going beyond publication, therefore, to think about what is our audience, how do we target it, and I agree very much it links the two points, that there are target audiences out there, depending on the nature of the report; there is a target audience within the Palace itself and the crucial question is how do you make these very thorough, informed reports, available to Members in a way that excites their interest, where they feel they have the confidence to actually add to what is being said by those who are the experts in the area and have contributed to the report. That is a very real challenge, how can one produce material, other than the report itself, which would be of interest to Members. It may be that you can marry the two, because the sort of material you are putting out, say, to the attentive publics, the summaries and so on, should be made equally available to Members and more widely advertised within the House itself, because what we make available is a bit like the internet—we almost wait for Members themselves to go in and get the material rather than being far more proactive in pushing it out to Members, in a way that is both accessible but also attractive. That is one of the problems, and if I can digress onto the point we will probably come to about the website, if one looks at the National Forum in Ireland, never mind the concept, look at their website and then contrast that with this Committee’s page on the Parliament website. The Irish one is very attractive and you start clicking on the items because of the way it is presented, it excites your interest. With all due respect, if you look under the main page for this Committee on the Parliament website, you are not going to start clicking on all the reports because you are excited by the headings and the address.  

**Q53 Chairman:** I should mention at this point that some considerable work is now underway to improve the website, to make it more user friendly and less terrifying to people. One of the problems is that there are a lot of hits on the website, but they are fairly short and they do not necessarily come back again; that is one of our problems. We had a presentation last week from the website manager and from our clerk, Simon Burton, who unfortunately could not be here for this part of the afternoon, but we are expecting some considerable improvements to the website and have suggested some ways in which we think that could be done. I am interested to hear you expand a little bit on how we get to target audiences outside. There is one issue here which interests me very much and that is how we might be able to use existing networks outside such as, for example, libraries. Has anyone any ideas about how can we get our work, which Lord Harrison has modestly described as “often excellent”—which I think is absolutely true of the work of the Committee—into those places where the public may actually go looking for it?  

**Baroness Williams of Crosby:** I have one, which is following Lord Norton’s response to Lord Harrison, which I must mention; we made the earlier point that the website is extremely useful, but it is also passive. I think that most of my colleagues sitting around the table will recognise the same as I do, that you have huge numbers of people advertising meetings and all the rest of it on email systems, most of the all party groups advertise themselves in this way so that they seize your attention, whereas the website is waiting for you to bring your attention to it. One of the things I wonder—and I suppose it might be thought to be rather vulgar—is whether one might not be able, for example, to say “Agricultural Sub-Committee says CPA must be ended by the end of this year” and then after that the reference back to the report by the Committee. With respect, I do not think that the Committee does seize people’s attention, and that attention goes beyond the expert attention to which, quite rightly, we have been referring ourselves; it has got to be something that excites the interest of people beyond that in a group. It is absolutely right what Lord Norton said, that the specialised audience which is not a Lords audience has a very strong overlap with the audience that is a Lords audience, in other words the people who specialise in a particular area are both inside and outside this House and the other place, so we need to have the same technique of reaching both. The only other thing I would say is there is something to be said for actually using techniques of displaying conclusions in a way that will seize people’s attention; not more than a sentence if you like, but a sentence that goes out to people who have expressed enough interest to actually offer their
email addresses to this Committee’s staff, who are exactly some of the people that we want to reach. Those active networks are a very effective way of getting information across, at least as effective as websites.

Lord Williamson of Horton: We really do have to give more attention to publicity. We started at zero and when I first came onto the Committee the publicity was as close to zero as you can get, if I may say, and there have been quite a lot of improvements, but I really think we do have to think much more about it. I am going to quote out of context from your question five which says “If the result were to be more publicity would this be a price worth paying?” I am sure it is the wrong way round, even though I am quoting it out of context. These reports are really good and we do need to see whether we cannot identify better the places where they could be well-received and would influence opinion, both in the House and outside, and there is a lot more to be done. If one may just say so, because I am now the Convener of the Cross-bench peers, when we want to get publicity for a cross-bench debate we are far better equipped to do that than this Committee. We have at least 1,400 journalists, with all their details—names and interests—on our database, and when we have a cross-bench debate like we had with Lord May we make a giant effort. Before that debate we spoke to dozens of journalists, we distributed the text everywhere, we had the Royal Society’s publicity officers doing their work, we had an absolutely fantastic response in the papers, dozens of articles. We sent 100 copies to Members of the House of Commons, practically all of them replied, and it was just completely different. Much more can be done to get a good reaction. It is not propaganda, it is getting a good reaction to sensible proposals, sensible material, and we just do not do enough about it. We could do better.

Chairman: I agree with you entirely.

The Committee suspended from 3.56 pm to 4.08 pm for a division in the House.

Chairman: That division has had a most salutary effect because it has now brought all our Members to the table, which is very nice indeed. We should really only run for another 15 to 20 minutes and we have still got one or two issues we want to raise. I know Lord Renton has been waiting to speak and then I am going to call on Lord Dubs before we go back to our witnesses.

Lord Renton of Mount Harry: I do not want to go on stressing the work of the Environment and Agricultural Sub-Committee too much, but the fact is of course that with the EU now moving into these new strategic issues for air, water, floods and climate change, the amount of legislation that is going to flow from that side of the EU in the years ahead is actually going to be tremendous. I look just at three of our scrutiny items for tomorrow and it is all EU stuff: the first is a proposal for a directive on the assessment and management of floods, the next is further guidance on the EU Emissions Trading Scheme—which is of course climate change, carbon dioxide emissions—and the third is a proposal for a directive laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production. I do not think this is exactly what the forefathers of the EU imagined the EU doing, but it is doing it now and in a sense it is becoming more and more popularly involved. I am very interested in the recommendations, My Lord Chairman, of Lady Williams, they are very interesting ideas. I served on Lord Puttnam’s Hansard Commission last year on how Parliament could communicate itself better and the Scottish Parliament are actually giving us a lesson in this respect. One idea that they have which we could think about is actually committees like ours travelling around the country, being available in the different major cities, saying we are going to be there so that anyone who wants to come can come and speak for a minute or two on a subject of their interest. Equally we could see that we not only encourage schoolchildren to come to Westminster, but perhaps in the summer holidays we could let them debate in the Chamber and see what they thought about it. Our Committee is suffering from the same trouble as an awful lot of committees; it is very difficult to get interest. The website is fine, but it only goes so far and I think we do have to look at really sharing ideas with the young, with others, select committees travelling around the country, if we are going to change things.

Chairman: I was just about to say when the division bell rang that very minor mitigation of our poor performance, compared to that of the cross-benchers in advertising and getting their debates taken notice of, is the fact that we do not, unfortunately, except on very rare occasions, share the privilege of any of the parties or the cross-benchers of getting prime time for our debates. One of the problems is that when our debates are put on, as they all too often are, as the last debate on a Thursday, or possibly on a Friday morning, it is not very conducive to attendance beyond those who in fact feel they must be there because they were members of the sub-committee.

Before we go to Lord Norton and the panel again; Lord Dubs.

Lord Dubs: Can I agree very much with what Lord Renton said, I am absolutely in full agreement. However, when I was on the Home Affairs Select Committee in the Commons on one occasion I had a journalist come up to me and say “you are doing this study, can you let me see a draft before it is
published?” I did not give it to him because I knew I would be in big trouble if I did and it was not proper to do it, but I have to say that showed a level of interest in reports which were not more interesting than ours. I know the Commons also have difficulties in getting over to the public, but the fact was that journalists were interested to get a leak of a report, when nobody cares a hoot to get a leak of our reports, and if they do they keep very quiet about having been approached—I certainly have never had a journalist show any interest. I do not think it is a matter of substance, it is about the presentation, and I am tempted to say, not too irreverently, if we had Alistair Campbell advising us maybe we would get all the publicity we want. Maybe we are just too worthy in our approach. Our reports, I have to say, do look a bit dull and the titles are a bit dull. I remember once on one of the sub-committees I suggested that we call it “Bolting the Stable Door” and we could not quite have a title like that, it all had to be very worthy. Maybe we are being a bit too worthy and if we did what Lord Renton has suggested then we might get it over. Maybe this is a very un-Lords type of approach, but maybe we have to do it if we want to get people excited, do a few of the innovative things that Lord Renton said and stop being quite as worthy as we are.

Q54 Chairman: Thank you, I would endorse that.
Lord Norton of Louth: I do not think it is necessarily a case of being less worthy, the substance is there, but I agree very much that it is a point of dissemination, and in response to Lord Renton it brings us onto the topic that we have not really got our teeth into, and that is simply one of resources—what resources are you going to deploy for the purpose of dissemination. I was struck by Lord Renton’s comparison with the Scottish Parliament; I did put down a question two or three years back on what were the resources available to this House for disseminating information about what the House does and what was the comparable figure for the Scottish Parliament? In this House we now have about two or three people responsible for disseminating information; in the Scottish Parliament the figure is over 20. The fact that they have got those resources is a consequence of attitude, that there is a feeling that we should be, if you like, almost a trade, selling our wares, getting out there and letting people know what is going on. They have that attitude of mind and I think we have not quite achieved that attitude of mind, on the basis of which you then make the resources available to actually disseminate the material.

Q55 Chairman: Lord Williamson and Lady Williams, I know you are under time pressure, but would you like to give us further thoughts? I am very interested in what I heard you saying earlier, not in this Committee, about the use of libraries as a means of getting our material out. I do not know whether you want to reinforce that point again.

Lord Williamson of Horton: I agree with the most recent comments, there is a lot more that can be done. We do have to be a little bit more adventurous and of course there may be a little bit more use of resources—and we all know how difficult it is to get resources—but we have to nonetheless look for what the objective is: the objective is to give a good report, with plenty of information for the House. For years, however, we have been believing that we are also influencing the Government and public opinion, but we have not actually been doing it all that much, so you could choose to put a bit more resources in there and I personally would think that was perfectly reasonable.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: I suggest an experiment, if you like, taking one of these big issues rather than the legal, smaller ones. If you actually had a discussion within the sub-committee and then if that is appropriate the main committee, but then as you are about to come up to the report, if it is a big issue like energy a European policy matter. I think you could certainly interest people in the BBC and so on. I think you could probably get good coverage from a programme like Analysis where indeed the emphasis is on explanation and not on advocacy. You could then use it also as the centrepiece for your seminars for schoolchildren and so on, and possibly also for a case study. You could bring together, therefore, four or five different ways of disseminating and getting across to the public the conclusions you have reached about a major publicity-capturing enterprise and see how it goes. I think it could go a very long way. The Scrutiny Committee is a really serious player, though it is not necessarily seen to be, in the world of energy policy. That is just one of many examples.

Q56 Chairman: This may have to be the final question, but is there anything we can do about a very Euro-sceptic press or not? Do we just assume that by getting news out about what the Lords is doing to hold the Government to account, that this might in itself may put a dent in it, or is it a lost cause?

Lord Williamson of Horton: The first reply to what can we do about it is not much of course, that is quite obvious, but it depends what your medium term approach is. My medium term approach is that it is not necessary to get into a row with parts of the press about this, that and the other; they have strong views, they are going to present them and that is it, but I think in the medium term if you are presenting material about what has been done, for example, what is about to be done, across a very broad field, you will interest quite a lot of people. You may not get it into the Daily Mail of course, but there is such
a huge amount of public documents in the way of 
women’s magazines and other media, and quite a lot 
of those will pick it up. You are going to get a public, 
therefore, though you are not necessarily going to get 
the public that reads the daily press published in 
London. You can get a lot more information into 
regional press than you will get into the London 
press, that was my experience over 10 years, there 
always was much more in the regional press than the 
national press.

Baroness Williams of Crosby: The opportunities are 
huge; if one stream is blocked find another stream, 
there are any number of them and radio and 
television are much better than the press in terms of 
not being too biased one way or the other. I 
absolutely agree with Lord Williamson that the 
regional press is mostly very, very open to taking 
articles without anything like the bias that you get in 
London. We are much too London-centred on the 
whole, in all the work we do, and very often outside 
of London we encounter much more open minds.

Q57 Chairman: Any last word, Lord Norton?

Lord Norton of Louth: My response to the question 
whether seven is a bit like Lord Irvine’s response to 
the West Lothian question, which is I do not think 
you should ask it. It is rather a loaded question and I 
could not help wondering, if there was a perceived 
pro-European bias on the part of the press, whether 
one would ask the same question.

Chairman: Okay, fair enough. We fully recognise 
that there is nothing wrong in Euro-scepticism in the 
press, it is more the inaccuracies that worry us, 
particularly inaccuracies in the scant reporting that 
there is of our own work which can sometimes send 
us into a deep depression, but I take what you have 
said very seriously. I am sorry we could not have 
more time, but I know you are under pressure and 
this is a rather unusual time for us to be meeting, also 
there is plenty of business downstairs and elsewhere. 
I would just like to thank you on behalf of the 
Committee for your very helpful answers to our 
questions and your comments, and for the written 
evidence that you have sent in. This will help us 
immensely in coming to some conclusions about 
what we should do to try and make the work of this 
committee better known to this House—it is very 
important not to forget that—and to the outside 
world in the hope that we can demonstrate to the 
outside world that we are doing a good job in holding 
our Government to account and taking a really 
serious look at what the European Union, through its 
institutions, is doing, because this might enlighten the 
public which is what we would like to see. Thank you 
very much indeed.
TUESDAY 14 MARCH 2006

Present

Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood, L
Dubbs, L
Geddes, L
Grenfell, L (Chairman)

Harrison, L
Maclean of Rogart, L
Neill of Bladen, L
Thomas of Walliswood, B
Wright of Richmond, L

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Mr Michael White, Political Editor, The Guardian, and Mr John Hipwood, Political Editor, Wolverhampton Express & Star, examined.

Q58 Chairman: John Hipwood and Michael White, thank you both very much indeed for being with us this afternoon, this is a great pleasure. I should tell you right from the beginning that this is going to be recorded and will be webcast in the usual way. We will be sending you the transcript of the conversation so that you can make sure we have correctly reflected what you have said; you are at liberty to correct where you feel it needs correcting. The final report will have all the corrections in it. If we may, we will start by asking you if you would like to make opening statements; then since we have given you a note on some of the areas that we would like to discuss, maybe we could go directly into that with our members asking what questions they like and eliciting your answers. Would either of you like to make an opening statement? It is not obligatory, but if you would we are very happy to hear it.

Mr Hipwood: I have no specific opening statement to make on the subject before you today, but it might be helpful to members of the Committee who do not know me—you are much more likely to know Michael—my name is John Hipwood, as you do know, and I am London editor, political editor, of the Express & Star which publishes in the West Midlands and the Shropshire Star, two regional evening newspapers. The Express & Star is the largest regional newspaper in the country and the Shropshire Star is the ninth largest in the country. I am the former chairman of the Parliamentary Lobby and was last year chairman of the press gallery. I am happy to answer any questions that you might give to me.

Mr White: I certainly picked the right person to come; thank you very much indeed. Michael White we know of old, but would you like to say anything?

Q59 Chairman: We certainly picked the right person to come; thank you very much indeed. Michael White we know of old, but would you like to say anything?

Mr White: I too think we would be better going to the questions. I would only answer to reinforce John’s point that when I was a very young journalist 40 years ago the Wolverhampton Express & Star was edited by a man called Clement Jones who was at the cutting edge of the new technologies, then wet offset presses, on his paper and throughout the entire country, well before Fleet Street. He was the father of a journalist known to you. George Jones and his brother Nick Jones, who always panted a great deal on the radio to stress the urgency of the news he was bringing. Clement Jones was a great friend of Enoch Powell, with whom the Jones boys visited churches all over the West Midlands as little boys, and they fell out over a famous matter, which we all know about, in 1968. An anecdotal digression.

Lord Harrison: More, more.

Q60 Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. Going from the sublime to the not quite so sublime, let us move on to the business in hand. The first thing we wanted to elicit from you is a rather obvious question, which is the extent to which you think your readers are interested in the work of the House of Lords in holding the Government to account, and whether you think that there are better ways in which we could present it so that we would attract more attention, or is it that the content of our work is just not what appeals to the public? Maybe you could give us some preliminary thoughts on that—whatever would like to go first, I leave it to you to decide that.

Mr White: I would certainly want to start by offering a wider context, which is that you are seeking to publicise the work of your Committee in particular, the Lords in general, and so are we. Like you we find it difficult and, over the 30 odd years on and off during which I have been a holder of a press pass within the Palace of Westminster, it has not become easy. I remember vividly, when I started out, thinking we need to cover the Lords more and trying so to do, but rarely succeeding, and the marketisation of news has meant both good things and bad things. One of the practical things it has meant is that whereas 30, 40, 50 years ago the primacy of Parliament, the primacy of the courts, the great institutions of state were the dominant aspects of what was reported, and you had political correspondents, defence correspondents and diplomatic correspondents, now you have an enormous range of specialisms—legal correspondents, media correspondents of course, environmental correspondents and many more sources of information and dispute, so as you all know as members of the usually neglected Upper
House, unless you actually vote the Government down or out, or vote its Bills down or amend them as you are in the process of doing (or not as the case may turn out to be this week) it is difficult for you to get attention. However, it is also difficult for us as political journalists to get things into the newspaper, which we would have got in more easily 10 years ago, or five years ago, or even a year ago. It is really quite a sharp curve and, as I say, in general terms it arises from the marketisation of news, and what is deemed to be important is much more varied. You, in one of your notes to us, used the alarming phrase “dumbing-down” which at my age I tend to use more frequently than I should, because some of the new developments are wonderful. I watched the David Attenborough programme on Sunday night called *Planet Earth* which would have been inconceivable on the television 20 years ago, so just as you lose good television plays, you gain David Attenborough’s wonderful programmes. I am not suggesting it is all about dumbing-down or all about loss, but it is a real problem reporting Parliament, in all its manifestations. Debates in the House of Commons—*The Times* abandoned its Parliamentary page 10 or eleven years ago, which was the sheet-anchor of Parliamentary coverage as distinct from political coverage, and all the other papers which had less ambitious pages and certainly fewer staff to do it, followed suit. That is the context in which your inquiry finds itself and we find ourselves too; instinctively we are on your side. I remember one of your recent reports, *Economic Migration to the EU* trying to get into my paper—I cannot remember whether others had more success than I did or failed, but it is a constant struggle.

**Q61 Chairman:** The fact that we do not have the power here, as you have suggested, does have a big effect, and which might be the reason why, for example—this has always stuck in my memory—just before the invasion of Iraq there was a debate in the House of Lords on the Iraq situation, with some very, very distinguished speakers, on the same day that there was one in the House of Commons. I could not find a single mention in the press of the Iraq debate in the Lords, which I thought was one of the best debates we had had for a very long time, in contrast with the rather less focused and less interesting debate in the Commons. That is part of the problem that we face. Before I ask Lord Wright to come in on this, Mr Hipwood, would you like to add anything?  

**Mr Hipwood:** Michael has summed up the picture that we are looking at very well. From a regional point of view you have only got to look at the House of Commons press gallery to realise how few debates are reported on a regular basis by anybody. Prime Minister’s Question Time will tell you what the debates will be for the next week, but the press gallery rarely fills nowadays with journalists and we do not come to the House of Lords to report on a regular basis any longer. Statements in the House of Lords, because of their timing, used to be very useful to us, particularly on evening papers, because they usually fell about an hour or three-quarters of an hour, perhaps, before the timing of statements in the House of Commons. That no longer applies and so evening regional newspapers like myself will get their information generally from the House of Commons. As far as the committees are concerned—and this Committee has got a huge remit, I did not realise what a fantastic remit it had got until I looked more closely after being invited to give evidence to the Committee—it is clear, and we do not doubt, looking at the membership of committees, with former ministers and former civil servants, the expertise is there. What you have got to do is make your reports sufficiently interesting to interest us and then we have to make our reports of your reports sufficiently interesting to get past the news editors on regional newspapers and indeed on national ones. The same applies, I am sure, to the broadcasting organisations. Who are interested almost entirely in celebrity nowadays rather than in substance. That is a constant battle that we fight—as Michael says, we have more difficulty getting serious political stories into the papers and serious Parliamentary stories into the papers, every day of every week. In the Commons it is easier for us to get stories in when we are reporting our local or regional MPs. There is a local peer on the Committee today and when a peer from the West Midlands speaks in the House of Lords I will generally pick up on it and report it; it does not happen too regularly and that is one of the problems, but that is a way in as far as we are concerned in the regional press. A lot of my regional colleagues now do not report the national news, they purely report what their MPs are saying about the national news.  

**Chairman:** Thank you very much, that is very helpful. Lord Wright.

**Q62 Lord Wright of Richmond:** Michael White, you referred, by implication, to the likelihood of ping-pong voting later this week. Insofar as the press covers this as anything other than a row between the two Houses, does it actually serve to highlight the existence of the House of Lords to many people who probably are not aware of what it is or does, or does it damage the image of the House of Lords as an unelected House having a squabble with the elected House?  

**Mr White:** That would be certainly the way the Labour—I am trying to get away from using the word spin-doctor, but I cannot, we have all abandoned that one; that will be the way it is presented because it always is by governments—even Conservative governments—in tight corners, that the
Q64 Lord Dubs: I appreciate that, because I have noticed how the Commons do that. What you are actually saying is that although we are not as interesting to the public as the Commons, for obvious reasons, we could actually project ourselves, and certainly our Select Committee reports, in such a way as to make a greater impact than we have done so far. Mr Hipwood: If you have a strong voice, someone who is media-friendly, who can go onto radio and TV and put the line, then that is a very useful starting-off point to get your reports into the media. Of course, one of the practices of newspapers nowadays, I am afraid—certainly we do this on evening papers—is to tune into the Today programme in particular and pick up on what they are doing because it gives you a minister or, indeed, somebody like Edward Leigh who will give you an early line in the day for that day’s news. Mr White: It will be minuted that John mentioned the Today programme first, and rightly so. There is a case for Newsnight, but not many people watch it—I sometimes wonder whether Jeremy Paxman watches it—but the Today programme is the battleground where the Government, wanting to set the agenda, sets the parameter of debate on its own terms, and sometimes it works well. I thought the Today programme discussion of this report this morning was perfectly sensible and civilised and encompassed a number of views. It is not always that way, but that is certainly the place to do it. John is right about the PAC, it puts reports out on the internet—we get a copy 24 hours ahead of events under embargo—and I would make two further points about the PAC: it is the only committee of either House which has the kind of real bureaucratic resources behind which a Senate or a House committee would have on Capitol Hill, in my experience of both—it is an unusual beast because it has all those clever people down the road—and, secondly, the obvious point is that asylum is an issue which always excites certain newspapers. This particular report did not get much play in my paper this morning, not as much as it should have done, and the Government has managed to get asylum off the front pages in what I would call the post-Blunkett era, so there is a feeling that here is an opportunity to put it back where some papers think it ought to be. The BBC sometimes reads the first editions at midnight, thinks this is a good story, it is a quiet day, let us do it; and today Mr Leigh hit the button.

Q65 Chairman: Before calling on Lord Harrison, just to recap on those last two answers which I thought were extremely helpful, first we need to choose more carefully the moment we publish our reports—and we do have some flexibility there, but not a great deal—and, secondly, the members of the Committee, particularly the sub-committee chairs, who are the most familiar with the subject-matter of
the reports since they have chaired the inquiries, although they come to the Select Committee for approval, need to be active in promoting their reports to the media. That is something that we have to consider.

Mr Hipwood: May I make a minor point on what you said about timing? The timing of publication is of interest to me in particular, working for two evening newspapers, not only the day of publication but also the actual embargo time. You do provide embargoed copies of reports which is of course very helpful—in fact, it is absolutely essential, I would say—but they are generally timed for 0001, which is fine for the morning papers, of course, but absolutely hopeless for the evening papers. We will generally follow up on them if a report is sufficiently interesting and is making the headlines, but just occasionally—and it is an idea to bring in the EMEA as the agency that could, if a report is suitable, issue an embargo. They will be given embargoed copies of reports which is of course very helpful. In one particular area the local evening newspaper will outsell the whole of the rest of the national press. That is just something worth bearing in mind that is quite often forgotten.

Chairman: Whilst harbouring the hope that if the story was strong enough it still might make the following day’s nationals, but that is a risk one would take. Lord Harrison.

Q66 Lord Harrison: My Lord Chairman, I thought Mr Hipwood was very honest in saying he was unaware of the width of the remit of this Committee before he looked it up and is now appearing before us. It speaks volumes if a colleague who is so senior in the newspaper world is ignorant of what we are doing and our remit; we have a lot to do. I would like to take advice from our colleagues on not only the issue of timing but also this question of trivialising or otherwise the content of our reports. Just to go back to the timing, I was very conscious that when we did our report on Sub-Committee G, under the chairmanship of Lord Williamson, the Working Time Directive, in that extensive report the alarm bell was rung about the implications that certain aspects of this directive would have on the National Health Service the following autumn. I was then surprised when, finally, the press woke up to the fact that there was a problem and we were not referred to, although in fact if you had read the report there was a lot of meat there that would have been immediately useful for anyone reading it. I do not understand how we, actually arriving too early on the scene, could have avoided that problem. Perhaps I might just go on to the other one that I wanted to raise which was more recently under Lady Thomas’s leadership when we did the very good report on paediatric medicines. I thought it was in-depth and it spoke of the opportunities that arose from sharing with colleagues in the European Union through the EMEA the ability to judge and understand about paediatric medicines. In the press release that we put out there was reference to the fact that some 90 per cent of drugs which are used on babies and young children have not been tested, and there are a variety of reasons for that, but that was immediately presented—and this one was taken up by the press—as one where babies were put at peril by the doctors involved in this. There was much more depth to the report and also solutions offered in the sense that we were being asked whether it was a useful idea to bring in the EMEA as the agency that could, at a European level, study these medicines. We had the wrong answer in a way; we offered up to the media a useful, sum-like headline, but what we perhaps did not do was deepen knowledge that might have been useful to all of us. How do we overcome those twin problems?

Mr White: I think I speak for us both when I say that nothing we say this afternoon should be taken as a counsel of despair, because there are opportunities in this hydra-headed, 24/7, three dedicated TV channels world that we live in, and the very fact that people can sit at home and tune into a debate in the Lords or the Commons, or dial-up Hansard on the internet is astonishing, and there are people who do it. We read in the papers this week that there are people who spend more time on their computers than they spend watching television these days—and in that sense that is the wider public, rather than we as intermediaries and transmission belts to the wider public. I am surprised you only say that the Lords report on the Working Time Directive was an example of foresight for which you did not get the credit; I am sure there are lots, I am aware of them. Sometimes it is a matter of timing and luck and an issue is not fashionable in the media. There are times when you think a week ago this report would have been immediately useful for anyone who read it. I do not understand how we, actually arriving too early on the scene, could have avoided that problem. Perhaps I might just go on to the other one that I wanted to raise which was more recently under Lady Thomas’s leadership when we did the very good report on paediatric medicines. I thought it was in-depth and it spoke of the opportunities that arose from sharing with colleagues in the European Union through the EMEA the ability to judge and understand about paediatric medicines. In the press release that we put out there was reference to the fact that some 90 per cent of drugs which are used on babies and young children have not been tested, and there are a variety of reasons for that, but that was immediately presented—and this one was taken up by the press—as one where babies were put at peril by the doctors involved in this. There was much more depth to the report and also solutions offered in the sense that we were being asked whether it was a useful idea to bring in the EMEA as the agency that could, at a European level, study these medicines. We had the wrong answer in a way; we offered up to the media a useful, sum-like headline, but what we perhaps did not do was deepen knowledge that might have been useful to all of us. How do we overcome those twin problems?
be encouraged to ring so-and-so at the BBC or at the FT, at The Times or whatever, and say: “We have a good report coming out on Thursday, the tabloids will all go chasing the babies bit as they do—‘Babies at Peril’ sounds good, it fits into a nice neat headline—but you might be better advised reading pages 78 to 83 because I think you will find something of more substance for the long term there.” These reports, which you produce, which I sometimes read and still fail to get into the newspaper, can be pretty solid. The quality of them is often good, but they can be a centimetre thick. We are showered with documents in the age of transparency and openness—it is the old American joke: the Soviets run society by telling people nothing, we control society by telling people everything; we all know that joke. There is certainly a lot more paper around the system than there used to be and you have to pick and choose, and a nudge of the elbow saying pages 77 to 84—you are likely to find time to read seven pages and then, dare I say it, if you were to tell two people who got something out of it and the rival newspapers were made to look foolish because it is front page lead in The Times—and this does happen, particularly on medical matters, they are quite bullish on medical matters in The Times—the next time the other papers saw a report coming down the slipway from your Committee they might say, oh yes, it was those people who dropped me in the cart last time because I did not read the report. There is a competitive dynamic you can help to generate there, and as you are under no obligation to treat all the newspapers with equal fairness—you might be, but your young man can be more discriminating—you can operate that way. There are plenty of people who do that in governmental systems and one cannot complain.

Q68  Lord Harrison: Could I just come back briefly? Those answers still worry me because you are doing what a newspaper person will do and saying what is the golden arrow of this particular story that we could run? My feeling—and I know it is shared by a lot of colleagues around the table—is that that is ultimately trivialising, it is reshaping the Lords in order to get the headline when, actually, we think that there is perhaps more to the subject. Often the good news story about so many of these European Union stories is that something is being done about it, but because there is a large degree of Euro-scepticism still within our press, that element is excised in the final report and all you are left with is, literally, the baby in the bathwater in peril.

Mr White: When you mention the European Union and that particular aspect, we could spend the rest of today and tomorrow going into that. It is true what you say and one lives with it, and if this was a committee primarily concerned with promoting good news from the European Union then it is a despairing story; it is very difficult to break the template that says the shortage of gas in the UK energy market is primarily the fault of the French and the Germans who are hiding it, or selling it to each other for a third of the price. It is much more complicated than that, but it will always be put through that prism. The particular story of the Working Time Directive, therefore, is it a European story or is it a domestic story? The implications for the medical profession are clearly domestic, the training of junior doctors and things of that kind, but it would primarily fall between those two stools. The other thought which might be useful to have on the record is that if, of course, your press officer was promoting a story, would he ring a political correspondent or would he ring the specialist in the field—I mentioned
a minute ago how many there are, my own newspaper has three health and medical correspondents for whom both the issues which you cite are of potential interest. Again, you decide what is best, is this story primarily political or primarily one for a specialist who actually knows what a paediatrician does?

Chairman: I have to do a little management of the list of speakers because I know that Lord Geddes has to go shortly and Lord Wright would like to speak, and Lady Thomas.

Baroness Thomas of Walliswood: My question has already been answered, thank you, My Lord Chairman.

Chairman: Has it? Feel free to come back again in a moment. Lord Geddes and then Lord Wright.

Q69 Lord Geddes: My Lord Chairman, thank you; my apologies, but I will have to go in about five minutes, I have duties down below. Conspicuous so far by its absence has been any reference from either of our witnesses to reporting of debates on reports. On the timing and pre-presentation of those, would it help, for instance, to push slightly on the list of speakers with 24 hours to go, if you have some big names coming up in the debate—or is it the report itself that makes the headlines, or does not, as the case may be?

Mr Hipwood: In realistic terms it is the report itself which makes the initial impact, and all I would say about providing us with the list of speakers is that all information is useful information so it enables us to decide whether we want to make sure that we check out the debate. If we have not got the information we do not have a choice, so that would certainly be useful.

Mr White: I agree with John, all information is useful. Debates in the Lords do get picked up by *Yesterday in Parliament* and there are many outlets other than newspapers which come through the letterbox, such as magazines—I write for a magazine that most members will not have heard of, but I read the Lords debates on the subject—and specialist magazines in particular because of course one of the great strengths of the Lords is that it is full of people who were distinguished specialists in their field. When doctors talk about the Assisted Dying Bill and all the ethics of illness, ethical questions and legal questions are fascinating. When you had six generals talking about the Iraq War on the night of March 18 2003 and they were up against an absolutely critical vote in the Commons, you were going to be marginalised, but there have been other occasions when we have looked at the list and said, look, the bishop of so-and-so or whatever, and you do come. So it is not dead, but it is pretty marginalised and the public debate takes place in other forums, not least of all, as I say to MPs when they approach me across on College Green, if we invite you to College Green you do not have to come, but they like to come. All is not lost, it comes out in different ways.

Chairman: Our problem with *Yesterday in Parliament* is that they tend to pick out the more eccentric remarks.

Q70 Lord Geddes: We can all think of some.

Mr White: The BBC was going to relegate *Yesterday in Parliament*, if I remember, to nowhere at all, there was a battle to save it and it was saved, but in the process it has been popularised.

Mr Hipwood: And, indeed, put only on Radio 4 long wave.

Chairman: Thank you, Lord Geddes. Lord Wright.

Lord Wright of Richmond: Lord Geddes said exactly what I was going to say, only he said it better.

Lord Geddes: That is a good exit line.

Chairman: Do I have any other questions on this particular issue? Yes, Lord Brown.

Q71 Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood: Can I first say how touched I am that Mr Hipwood actually knows where Eaton-under-Heywood is; you are quite unique, I might say. At least, I assume that that was what you meant.

Mr Hipwood: Absolutely, you are very kind, sir.

Q72 Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood: I was wondering whether the House of Commons EU scrutiny reports are any more successful than ours in gaining more attention and publicity and, if so, why?

Mr Hipwood: In general you do a much more thorough job than the House of Commons tends to do. It is probably because you give more time and attention to it—seven sub-committees is quite phenomenal and you have roughly 70 members of the House of Lords who are putting information in all the time, so there is no way that the House of Commons can put that sort of time in—or if they could they do not. Your scrutiny reports tend to get looked at more closely, certainly by the specialist media that Michael has spoken of, than those from the House of Commons. We get the other Select Committee reports, sometimes two or three a week, and those can occupy our time well enough.

Q73 Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood: If we did grab your attention, what advantage actually would we gain from that? What we are striving to do I think with these reports is to scrutinise, criticise and influence—in other words to try and actually, in the long term, improve the quality of EU legislation—that is ultimately what we are primarily about. In your reports how could you assist us in achieving that? Would it be by highlighting these areas where we are concerned, and would you be somehow trying to underpin our concern and strive for improvement, or would the story actually run rather differently?
Just as another off-spin, would you realistically say this is an excellent body, doing frightfully good work, everybody ought to pay more attention to what they say. Is that actually the slant that the articles would gain; I rather wonder.

Mr White: Newspaper editorial writers are notorious for saying another under-reported report from the House of Lords, doing excellent work as usual, emerged last week; it is a source of grief, I am sure, to us both that you say we wrote a leader about it, we wrote an editorial about it, but we did not report it, we did not see it in the paper—this is part of the battleground of which I speak. What is our function? Newspapers in the last 20 to 25 years—probably since Watergate—see themselves perhaps in a more adversarial, hold-the-government-to-account role, not just because of Watergate but also because in the early 1980s the Labour Party was introverted, divided and not on Mrs Thatcher's case, and in the last decade the Conservative Party has been in a curiously similar position, and the press has rather abrogated to itself the view that we are holding them to account. I was on the phone this morning to my old friend Alan Watkins, whose name will be known to members of this Committees, who said “The brutal rough justice served out by The Sun and the Daily Mail to governments of the day has been an important factor in keeping them honest, and the more brutal their accusations are the more likely that a balanced view of the controversy of the moment will come out.” Your role, it seems to us, and our role in reporting your work is to raise questions about the public sphere and the public good, public policy, its direction, its quality, the way in which decisions are made, and by flagging them up—even in a crude way which does not meet with Lord Harrison’s platonic ideal of the essence of the report—then you are drawing the attention of the public and of officials across the Square and of politicians who always say, “Damn, that story has begun to run, we will have to do something.” It is rough and ready, but we are part of that process.

Chairman: Of course, the peculiarity of this Committee is that when we say we are holding the Government to account, what in effect we are doing is we are giving them due warning and firing shots across their bows before they take a decision on how to behave in the European Council, in its various formations, and we are not really in the business of holding the Government to account after it has done what it sees fit to do. We are a kind of an early warning mechanism, and that is, I think, where many of our strengths lie and we have had quite some successes and been able to influence Government behaviour in the European Union. Sometimes it takes them a very long time to cotton onto what it is that we are stuffing into those shells that we fire across their bows. Going back to 1998 we warned them that they would eventually have to bring Mrs Thatcher’s famous British cheque to the table for renegotiation; all we got was a nasty letter from the Treasury saying we did not know what we were talking about, but in the end we got there. That is our function, it is to tell them what we think they should be doing.

Lord Wright of Richmond: My Lord Chairman, may I just say that there are exceptions to this, and my sub-committee is at the moment doing an inquiry into the highly topical subject of the returns policy, returning failed asylum seekers. There are two things that are worth mentioning: that is that we are continuing this inquiry, even though the British Government has decided not to opt into the directive, and we see our role as trying to get the British Government, although opted-out, to take part in the discussions to try to improve the directive, but the other thing that I think is worth knowing about—and I doubt whether many members of the public realise this—we are actually the only Parliament that is doing inquiries of this sort. In fact, we were in Brussels last week and asked the Commission who else is looking into this—something as usual, no one”. It is a point about Lords’ inquiries, which are held in quite high esteem in Brussels.

Q74 Chairman: I could add to that Commissioner Franco Frattini feels quite free to consult with us on his programmes in a closed room before going ahead—sorry, we are just blowing our trumpet.

Mr White: It leads me to a point I was anxious to make in some part of the proceedings, which is the extent to which, as part of this new media world we have to cope with every day, internet access in the English language—which is still the dominant language of the internet—can have consequences and influence way beyond anything any of us were used to years ago, should not be under-estimated. Today my newspaper has formally launched a new website called Comment is Free in which all sorts of commentators from all around the world are invited to contribute—blog is the word of choice among the young people, and I am glad to see nodding, knowing heads at this point—on issues—

Q75 Baroness Thomas of Walliswood: I know the word.

Mr White: In a sense, I could leave this room and go and write about my experience here today and invite comment—and this is the point I am leading to in response to what Lord Wright has said. The degree of interactivity which can be generated by these sorts of mechanisms—there is a process by which in typing I can in some way type in—you have all seen it and I have only just learned how to do it—a website which then appears in blue, and when you click it, lo and
behind, you are moved to Lord Wright’s sub-committee report, or indeed a counter report from the Swedish Parliament. The extent to which this generates cross-fertilisation, some of it futile and narcissistic but a lot of it of very high quality, is extraordinary, and one of the things I want to suggest to you is that active steps should be taken to get links. The critical word is “links” so that when somebody types into the magic Google machine “Returns policy of the European Union” at some point it will bring up the link to your report. I am not an expert on the subject, as I say, it is a new field for me too, but you become aware of its potential.

**Q76 Chairman:** That is something in fact that we are working on because a lot of work has been done on our website to link it up in the way that you have suggested and we hope that we will be able to put that into effect fairly soon, so I think it is very important indeed. I am wondering about the extent to which journalists do look at our website at all.

**Mr Hipwood:** Journalists, like members of the public I am sure, when they are searching the internet go for issues, they do not go for titles, so people will not be putting into the Google search engine “House of Lords Committee on the European Union”, those are not the words they will be putting in, they will be doing as Michael has just mentioned, returns policy, drugs for babies or whatever it might be. If you then have those links in there and yours comes in the first 10 or 20 search engine sites, then you are away, without a doubt. That is the way it happens, not by putting in the title of the Select Committee.

**Q77 Lord Neill of Bladen:** Mr White, you quoted a moment ago half a famous quotation, you said “Comment is free...” and the other half was “facts are expensive”.

**Mr White:** I think that is the revised version.

**Q78 Lord Neill of Bladen:** What I was going to put to you is that I thought that was no longer true, there are too many facts and you are overwhelmed by the amount of information that is coming in all the time and having to make a choice as to which sources are reliable and so on. I wanted to lead on to a question I am very interested in—slightly off limits perhaps—I have the impression that the amount of information that gets onto websites or wherever illegitimately has increased enormously—the opinion the Attorney-General wrote is an example. This is relevant to all sorts of things, including the identity card debate.

**Mr White:** I am not competent to give you a competent answer to the amount of leaking on the website. My impression, and John may correct me, is that the beauty of putting a leaked document on a website is that it will have no fingerprints on it, and it is also generally accessible, so if you have the Attorney-General’s famous legal advice on the war, by putting it on the site—Channel 4 News was the one on this particular occasion, or possibly on The Guardian’s simultaneously—it will get to some of these people with their books and their leaks, and it was coming from an academic in that case, I think. The leaders who are keen on this—and as you know there are a number of people who devote a large part of their lives to this particular subject now—can access it almost immediately, not with an intermediary like me giving a partial (in both senses of the word) account in the newspaper in the morning, they can read it themselves and make up their own mind. That seems to me a plus, it creates several levels of democracy because some people are, in the phrase of the moment, information-rich and other people do not know. The possibility that one can read all these things is astonishing. Just for the record, C P Scott said “Comment is free but facts are sacred” and the “facts are expensive” remark came as the cost of foreign correspondents rose, I think. You are right, however, that is the historical reference, but I forget the name of the site. In my opinion, oddly enough, in media there is perhaps too much commentary and not enough basic reporting. We are both reporters—would you agree with that?

**Mr Hipwood:** Absolutely.

**Mr White:** There are too many comment pages and not enough news pages coming out reporting what has been going on.

**Baroness Thomas of Walliswood:** I always think I do not need anyone to tell me what to think about something. I can tell myself what to think about it, I would like to get facts or something approximate to the facts. I would like to go back in a way. My Lord Chairman, to this idea of the message because in a country which is so cynical about the European Union it seems to me that there is just the possibility that the message that there is an organisation in Parliament which is trying to influence what happens in Europe, with an understanding of how it would affect our country and what we can do to make that point of view—I know we are very minor player because whatever we say goes through the medium of somebody else who is actually in Council, and we do not go and directly put these points. I wondered if that was a story which was actually worthwhile trying to get across, because people in this country particularly—it is the Channel, basically, it is that 22 miles distance and the historic effect of that—just feel “I don’t know what goes on there, I don’t understand it so I hate it, all of it, it is just all bad”.

**Lord Wright of Richmond:** And it is nothing to do with Britain.

**Q79 Baroness Thomas of Walliswood:** It is nothing to do with us. The idea that actually there are people trying to as it were make an impact on what happens
in Brussels by doing the work that we do, seems to be
one which might have—not all the time, but from
time to time—an impact and attract the attention at
any rate of some people who read newspapers, who
make that point. Do you think that is a fair comment,
or am I just being romantic?
Mr Hipwood: I certainly think that Euro-scepticism is
here to stay, it is not just a fashion, it will be here with
us for as long as I am still reporting for my particular
newspapers or any other, but if you start off from that
standpoint and portray yourselves, if you like, as the
champions of the people who are actually trying to
find out what European legislation means to the man
on the Clapham omnibus, then that is not a bad way of
approaching it. You do have this role of looking at
legislation before it is actually enacted and perhaps
that could be done with UK legislation a little bit
more and we might get some better Bills on the statute
book. You will not get rid of Euro-sceptic newspapers, but what you can do is perhaps portray
yourselves a little bit more as the people who are
enquiring into the latest proposals from those
Brussels Eurocrats, as we like to call them.

Q80 Chairman: We recently completed an inquiry
on how to get less legislation and better legislation
out of the European Union and we spent some
considerable time and effort talking to Commissioner
Verheugen who is in charge of better regulation and
people like Sir David Arculus on this. We thought it
was a good message that we were trying to get across,
that the House of Lords was a champion of less
regulation and better regulation. We would have
liked to have got across to for example, the man on
the Clapham bendy-bus as I suppose we would call it
nowadays. It seems a good story, but it is
extraordinarily hard to sell, because it came from us
and therefore people wondered so what?
Mr White: In matters of European legislation which
are complicated and hard for most of us to
understand it is precisely an area where a negative
story like those straight bananas will have some
attraction, but something which is more constructive
will be difficult. My own impression is that
newspapers run heavily and cheerfully along a
slightly xenophobic agenda, but in terms of the
electorate one does not have to say very loudly that
the last three elections have been fought with the
result in which the issue of a Euro-sceptic public has
not worked with the wider electorate—it is around
in the background, but in terms of people’s priorities it
is far, far less important than you might imagine from
listening to the political pronouncements and the
newspapers. Iain Duncan-Smith realised that it was
not something that should be in the shop-window
quite as much as it had been, and David Cameron
seems, in a complicated way, to have the same sense
of it, so it may be coming down. That may be naively
optimistic too, of course.

Q81 Baroness Thomas of Walliswood: I do not think
one has to suppose that necessarily every Frenchman
thinks that the European Union is a good thing
either; they think the European Union is a good thing
when it is doing the thing that they want it to do, but
when it is doing something which they do not want it
to do, like altering the agricultural support system,
they think it is a jolly bad thing, thank you very
much, they would rather have the agricultural
support system they have now rather than a fair one
which might have—not all the time, but from
time to time—an impact and attract the attention at
any rate of some people who read newspapers, who
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yourselves a little bit more as the people who are
enquiring into the latest proposals from those
Brussels Eurocrats, as we like to call them.

Q82 Lord Dubs: Is it that we are rather dull and
worthy and really that is not terribly interesting for
the reader?
Mr Hipwood: The straight answer to that would be
yes, but that does not mean that it should always be
thus. You do the important work and you have to
find ways of getting across to the general and the
tabloid-style of newspaper. I do not mean that just
for the newspaper industry, that applies to all
broadcasters as well. You look at Sky TV, you look
at 24 hour news on BBC and it is all that type of
journalism, and you have to get in there unless you
want to be ignored altogether, and then it is as simple
as that. There will be serious newspapers who will
treat your report seriously, there will be specialists
who go in there and get right into the depths of a
report, and they will always do that, but if you want
the general coverage you have got to, I am afraid—
and Lord Harrison will call it trivialising it—get the
headline going.
Mr White: One can be serious without being dull—I
do not think Mr Churchill ever wrote a dull sentence,
did he? I read a report of the Lords last summer—I
am struggling to remember whose it was while
listening to you talk—about aviation fuel and green
taxes. There were some flashy phrases which
encouraged me to think that I would get it into the
paper—I do not remember, I have a feeling I failed
again, if only I could bring you a success—but I did
read it and there was some phrasing which summed
up the points you were trying to make in a lively way,
it was a serious report, but there was enough in it to
generate a headline. The extent to which busy people
are overloaded, with information coming at them
from all directions, you need to say why do I stop at
that point going through a newspaper? Why does a
phrase in the headline actually matter, because our
market research, for example, tells me that on the
financial pages if you have the name of a well-known company in the headline you are more like to be read than if you have your anodyne phrasing, and I am sure that applies to the FT as well.

Q83 Lord Dubs: Could I put this to you: perhaps we are being a little bit sensitive at this end of the building, in that I would imagine—and you will have experience of this, perhaps—that the people in the Commons would actually make the same sort of complaints, because it is only the very occasional Commons Select Committee Reports—and we can probably predict the ones, the one today, the Public Accounts Committee, was interesting because it was about people in this country who the Select Committee thought should not be and who should be removed, and that has a political resonance at a certain level. There must be many House of Commons Select Committee reports which do all the right things and which still do not get anywhere. Am I right?

Mr White: Off the top of my head, Treasury gets a pretty good coverage from the City departments of all the newspapers, the Foreign Affairs Committee often does pretty well, Home Affairs—in many ways it is the ones you would expect; they have strong chairmen, a lively agenda and they are proactive; they do short term reports and long term reports and they are getting it out at the right time, though it is hit and miss as we have said. Among the lesser committees, which might be deemed more optional, it depends on the subject, it depends on the chairman, and some of them do pretty well and some disappointingly. There was a good DFID report in the Commons a few weeks ago on Darfur which went nowhere in the press; I failed and others failed, but I managed to write an editorial and managed to encourage a colleague to write something, it is the way these things work. It is never wasted.

Mr Hipwood: The Health Committee produces a report on smoking, there is guaranteed coverage across the board. If the Home Affairs Committee produces one on policing or on anti-social behaviour, guaranteed coverage across the board. It is often the subject-matter and whether the recommendations are strong recommendations, whether they are being powerfully put by the chairman of the committee or the spokesman for the committee that makes the difference. I am afraid that in the end it is down to news value and that is what will judge the story—it is the interest that will generate amongst the public, whether it is being talked about, to use these old phrases, in the pubs and clubs that particular general comments, as I will about small businesses on evening. Thursday, is to talk about small businesses in Cheshire and so on and so forth. Is there a way in which we could be more athletic in reflecting where we are regional or local and the fact that there are a number of your Lordships who come from the

Q84 Lord Dubs: If I apply my old House of Commons test of how well would it go down if I started a conversation in the pubs on Battersea Park Road, that probably fits in very well with what you have said, the ones that would be good talking points in the pubs of Battersea Park Road are the very ones you have said have also got the publicity. I would find it very hard to open up a conversation about some of our reports in any of those pubs.

Mr Hipwood: But they have to be done.

Chairman: We hope you are still trying anyway. We must not keep you much longer, –this has been extraordinarily helpful and the fact that you have been here testifies to the wisdom of who you referred to of Owen Williams sitting in the corner, who I think is doing a very good job within the press gallery. I hope you find that having him around is very useful too.

Lord Harrison: My Lord Chairman, I did wonder whether we were going to take advantage of Mr Hipwood to ask about regional and local press, because I would like to do so.

Chairman: Yes, please do.

Q85 Lord Harrison: One of the worries I have about the House of Lords is that I do not think it does truly represent the regions and the localities of the United Kingdom, although there are a number of us, like me, who still live in the North West and still cock an ear when I go down to the pub, and I hope and believe we to some degree represent that area or try to reflect that in some of the speeches. I always find that a useful manner to employ when I am making more general comments, as I will about small businesses on Thursday, is to talk about small businesses in Cheshire and so on and so forth. Is there a way in which we could be more athletic in reflecting where we are regional or local and the fact that there are a number of your Lordships who come from the
various regions of the United Kingdom? Would it be helpful to you to have those identified, where people have local or regional interests? Is there more that we could do to get into the local press and actually then reveal that the House of Lords is saying things which perhaps are relevant to the lives of people who live locally? I make the comment as someone who had had to use the local press a lot—indeed, I was big in the Whitchurch Herald and the Hadleigh Advertiser in my days.

Mr Hipwood: I used to actually work in Whitchurch for the Shropshire Star, a long, long time ago.

Q86 Lord Harrison: Could we do more to use that press? Sometimes I thought we got a better ride in terms of—

Mr Hipwood: Of course you could. There is an impression out there, and I think it is probably a correct one, that the House of Lords is very South East/London orientated—I do not know what the percentage is of Members of the House who actually emanate from the south-east corner, but that is clearly a problem for regional newspapers who are not reporting on individuals from the South East. I do not think you will find too many reports in the London Evening Standard, for instance, of debates or even reports that are made in the House of Lords. What can you do to improve matters? For regional lobby correspondents, of whom there are probably about 30 working in the press gallery, they will always be grateful for a simple call to say did you know that I was doing this last night, or that I said this last night, or I am going to say this tonight. That is just down to individual peers, however, and we try to educate our MPs to do that for us because you cannot cover the waterfront, you cannot read every paragraph of Hansard on a daily basis, because other things are going to take you away and most of us are just working here on our own. On a more general basis, what can you do to highlight regional issues? Goodness knows, that takes an awful lot of people’s time to look at the debates; how you could do that I do not know, but it clearly would involve an awful lot of work for some individual or individuals, or I would say the message to the members is that if you have not got a lobby correspondent down here and cannot feed your information through him or her, then just ring the local paper or send in something. Personally, I hate press releases that just come from individual Parliamentarians—but they are better than nothing—because they tend to be rather one-sided, for obvious reasons, but it is a darn sight better than having nothing in the paper at all. First of all, then, contact your local lobby correspondent; secondly, if you have not got one, send a press release in or call the local chief reporter and say did you know I was doing this yesterday or I am doing this tomorrow. That is about as helpful as I can be.

Q87 Lord Neill of Bladen: I just wanted to make the point, arising out of Lord Harrison’s question, that there is a development of which I am aware, and that is I find I get letters from people who know that I live in Dorset, I get a mailbag—particularly on things like the Hunting Bill of course—on things like the right-to-die, assisted suicide and all that sort of thing, and the majority of my letters come from the county in which I live. I see from the nods that other Members of the Committee have had a similar experience and it is rather curious, there is some sort of educational process taking place out there and somebody is taking the trouble to look us all up to see where our country house is, or cottage or whatever.

Mr White: But a search engine on a computer can do that sort of thing.

Lord Neill of Bladen: But they have taken the trouble to do it, that is what I find.

Q88 Baroness Thomas of Walliswood: The lobbyists will do that.

Mr White: It is a tool for the lobbyist and the pressure group.

Chairman: The Countryside Alliance were very good at doing that and picking people out for the Hunting Bill. We have time for one last question. Lord Maclellan.

Q89 Lord Maclellan of Rogart: In 35 years in the House of Commons and five years here, looking at the press reporting of European issues, it has always struck me that the regional press has tended to come to grips with the nitty-gritty, if I can put it that way, rather better than the national press on the progress of legislation at least, and on the issues where the European Union is giving rise to discussion with interest groups. The coverage, for example, in the north part of Scotland which I represented of matters concerned with fishing, agriculture, regional development, the impact of changes in structure of aid upon the local economy, or threats to remove it or change it, the interaction between local government and Brussels, the interaction between Scottish government and Brussels, all that was very well reported. It seemed to me that, in a sense, Parliament has not plugged into that debate, which has been genuinely quite well reported. I wonder if there is some way in which we could do better. You get pressure groups galore like the NFU or small business concerns about what is being done here, and they are all reported, but what is actually thought about it by the political classes is much harder to see in your reportage. I wonder how you think we might get into that debate, which is not the national debate conducted at the national level, it is the regional
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debate. So far as the national debate is concerned, if I can just put the second part of the background, there is very limited coverage given to discussion of matters European at all in the press and it is very easy to see why we do not succeed because even in a paper of record such as the Financial Times, which has a page on Europe every day, at least two-thirds of it will be about the politics of other European countries and not about what is emanating from decisions of the European Parliament, the proposals of the Commission or decisions of the Council, and a lot more will be on the speculation and comment of the so-called European experts. There is a very great lack of connecting with the actual proposals that are in train, and one can understand there is a problem here for both regional and national press, in that actually it is in train: it is not a decision, it may be up for discussion and it may be capable of being influenced, so it is not terribly newsworthy until it is a straight banana.

Mr White: The connection which is so evident to your former constituents in the Highlands is a very clear one, that the European Union’s structural and regional policies have been very benign towards the kind of region you used to represent and had Objective 1 status for a long time, I presume, did they?

Q90 Lord Maclellan of Rogart: Yes, but it was two-way traffic.

Mr White: There is a clear connection, visible to people who live in those isolated communities, relatively small, between European Union policy and the impact on them in a way which, living in Lewisham, is rather less evident, so it is clear why there is positive reporting and a benign view of it all in the Highlands.

Q91 Lord Maclellan of Rogart: But it is not benign altogether, the fishermen were relatively besieged by it.

Mr White: I am sorry, that was silly of me, I had forgotten the fish.

Q92 Lord Maclellan of Rogart: It was entirely mixed reporting, but it was much more accurate, quality reporting, because people saw that their interests were engaged and affected. People in Edinburgh, whose whole livelihood depends upon the success of the financial sector, are very concerned about the Services Directive or about financial regulation, or about the 70 per cent of regulation which emanates from Brussels? We hear about it ex post facto but how can we get into this so that they can see that the political classes are taking their interests into account and are trying to do something about it?

Mr White: The measure of the difficulty which you describe lies in your assertion that the FT—which is the paper of Europe in a real sense, certainly across Western Europe—does not do what you are asking it to do; am I right, did I understand that correctly? Even the FT you were saying, does not—

Q93 Lord Maclellan of Rogart: It probably does it more than any other newspaper, but there is very much less of the total reportage of what is called European news than celebrities, whether Mr Berlusconi will hit Mr Prodi or walk out of the debate tonight on the eve of their election. That is the sort of thing that passes as European news. I remember talking to a BBC correspondent in Paris who had just returned from reporting a heads of government meeting on defence in Berlin which was attended by the French, the Germans and the Brits about serious decisions about the location of headquarters, about command structures. The Italians had not been asked to participate because they were not making a serious participation; the story which the Beeb editors wanted, he told me, was that Berlusconi was creating a furious row about not being there, whereas the actual story that he wanted to report was about the substantive decisions which had been taken which were actually important in terms of the capacity of the European Union to have a defence input into current crises. It is partly what you described as the celebrity problem, but it is also partly that there is not a complete appreciation of the totality of the critical process. We get discussion of the problem, we have discussion of the end point, but what goes on in the middle, which is what we are about, what we are trying to influence—

Q94 Chairman: I am afraid I am going to have to bring this to a close because we have run out of time, but if either of you would like a last word on that, please feel free.

Mr Hipwood: Briefly, Lord Maclellan, my only comment would be woe betide the editor of the Aberdeen Press and Journal who does not take these serious regional issues very seriously and report them in detail. On issues like fishing, any regional newspaper will know exactly the stories which are of interest to them and clearly they do report them seriously in that way, that is why you should be looking at the regional newspaper rather than the national newspapers for those stories. How do you get into them? You have got to be—it is this horrible word proactive, is it not? It is a terrible word to use, but you have got to be pushing the lines that you have and stressing all the time, you have got to be using Owen or some other device to make sure that news editors, reporters down here and reporters in the regions know precisely what the various sub-committees are doing on each of these subjects at any
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particular time. We cannot report what you are doing unless we know about it, so you have to be pushing that at us all the time. We can then reject it or use it, but we cannot do it if we do not know about it.  
Mr White: I would only wish to say that I would not want the Committee to go away thinking that whether or not Mr Berlusconi hits Mr Prodi is either uninteresting or unimportant when they meet on Italian television this evening.

Q95 Chairman: On that nice note we will finish. Thank you both very, very much, it has been extraordinarily helpful to us and I hope you have found it moderately enjoyable anyway. We will send you the transcript very soon. Thank you both enormously for your participation.  
Mr Hipwood: That is always the frightening part, when you read the rubbish that you have been spouting for most of the afternoon.  
Mr White: It is all a matter of punctuation.  
Chairman: Thank you very much indeed.
Written Evidence  
TAKEN BEFORE THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMITTEE

Letter from the Minister for Europe to the Chairman

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to your Committee for the forthcoming inquiry “A role for the House of Lords in presenting and explaining the European Union?”. I attach a memorandum accordingly, and I hope my evidence will contribute positively to the discussion.

During our Presidency of the EU, the Government worked hard to widen the debate about the future direction of Europe, seeking to ensure that the EU talks about what is on citizens’ minds and addresses their concerns. Developing the debate requires action at both EU and national levels. The Government is engaged in a broad debate about the future of Europe and in this context I look forward to reading your report.

10 February 2006

Memorandum from the Minister for Europe

1. The Committee’s call for evidence sought contributions to its forthcoming enquiry “A role for the House of Lords in presenting and explaining the European Union?”. I respond below along the following themes: general initiatives affecting National Parliaments; initiatives in the UK; the Danish/Swedish EU information centres; and the Irish National Forum for Europe.

General Initiatives Affecting National Parliaments

The European Commission’s Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate

2. The June 2005 European Council Declaration on “the ratification of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe” envisaged a role for the EU institutions in taking forward the national debates about the future of Europe in Member States. The European Commission’s Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate was published on 13 October 2005, and intends to define this role both during the period of reflection and beyond. Plan D aims to reengage Europe with its citizens and includes ideas like regular visits by the Commission President to Member States and a European citizens’ panel.

3. Plan D acknowledges that the primary responsibility for responding to the call for a period of reflection rests with Member States, envisaging a particular role for national parliaments in the “organisation and promotion” of national debates. Plan D recognises that a number of Member States already have established practice and effective scrutiny of EU decisions by national parliaments. The Commission proposes to develop its co-operation with the national parliaments of Member States where this is not the case, in keeping with its targets which revolve around three main themes: mutual service; concrete networking; and connecting with people and their elected representatives.

4. The Commission is working in co-operation with the European Parliament, and in consultation with the EU Speakers’ Conference and the Presidential Troika of COSAC, in the organisation of a forum in Brussels on 9 May to which national parliaments will be invited. The purpose of the forum will be to discuss the contribution of national parliaments to the period of reflection and examine how they might work with the EU institutions during this period.

The European Commission’s Annual Work Programme

5. The Conference of Speakers in Budapest in June 2005 called upon national parliaments “to hold a debate, preferably in plenary session each year, on the annual legislative and work programme of the European Commission with due regard for their internal work programme, legal framework and traditions”.

6. There is clearly potential for national parliaments to provide the Commission with fresh critical perspectives on their annual work programme. It is for Parliament to decide how this might work in practical terms.
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Initiatives in the UK

7. The Government is committed to taking forward a national debate by engaging and informing the UK public on the EU and the future of Europe. UK activities during the period of reflection can be divided into two phases. The first phase from July to December 2005 includes UK Presidency activities. The second phase starts in January 2006 and takes us through to the June 2006 European Council and beyond. The objective for each phase is essentially the same: to generate broad debate and to build consensus around the future direction of the EU. We aim to evaluate these activities prior to the June 2006 European Council. The UK and Austrian Presidencies jointly produced an interim report on national debates. The interim report was noted by the December European Council, and is being taken forward by the Austrians under their Presidency.

8. Since the June 2005 European Council Declaration on the EU Constitutional Treaty, the UK has undertaken a range of activities to generate debate about the future direction of the EU. At EU level the Hampton Court Summit gave a clear direction on how Europe responds to the challenges and opportunities of globalisation. The UK Presidency also co-hosted with the Dutch Government the “Sharing Power in Europe” conference which considered how to ensure we achieve the right balance between action at regional, national and EU levels.

9. In the UK, the Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Minister for Europe and other senior Ministers have all made high profile speeches to further debate on the future of Europe. Pamphlets published by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and myself sought to contribute to this debate. Other key stakeholders, including social partners have been targeted through events, conferences and online and offline communications. Information has been provided to the UK public through regional media and a range of publications.

10. We will launch a new website this year shortly to provide information on the EU and the future of Europe debate. We will also continue work engaging with key stakeholders—commercial, governmental and civil society—on issues related to this debate. Finally, we will work in partnership with the European Commission and European Parliament to co-ordinate activities, including on implementation of Plan D.

11. We support the Commission’s plan to open Europe Direct public information centres across the UK. The Commission has a legitimate role in providing information about the European Union to the public. We are working closely with the Commission to ensure the success of this service in the UK.

12. The European Commission has now issued a call for proposals, inviting applications by the end of this month and with a decision on bids being made by April. The call for proposals will ask for applications from a wide range of organisations including libraries, Regional Development Agencies and local government offices. The applicant must be a proven public sector body or private-law body with a public service mission. They must also prove they have the financial resources to run the centres throughout the whole period of the grant, in this case three years. The UK Commission Representation will manage the administration of the centres. The first Europe Direct Centres in the UK are due to open in May.

The Danish/Swedish EU Information Centres

13. Public EU Information Centres have been running in both Denmark and Sweden for a number of years. The centres, although attached to national parliaments, operate as an independent and neutral source of EU information. They operate mainly through their websites but also through a call centre staffed by EU experts who answer a range of enquiries on EU matters. In Denmark, members of the public can also call at the centre in person and speak to an advisor.

The Irish National Forum for Europe

14. Ireland has taken a different approach to the provision of information on the EU. The Irish National Forum was set up in light of the no vote on the Nice Treaty referendum in 2001 with the aim of providing politically neutral information to citizens on the EU. The Forum holds discussions and debates on EU issues around Ireland, aiming to reach as wide an audience as possible. A series of events took place on the EU Constitutional Treaty in advance of the planned referendum which was postponed in light of the no votes in France and the Netherlands. The Forum aims activities at schools programmes, youth parliaments, universities and local groups such as countryside guilds.
CONCLUSION

15. It is of course for each House of Parliament to decide what role it would like to play in presenting and explaining the European Union, rather than for a Minister to advise.

16. The House of Lords has a strong tradition of select committees tackling complex issues in a thorough and impartial manner. This is an important and valuable part of its work, which should be communicated more widely.

17. In light of the recent report by the Hansard Commission, the “Puttnam report”, committees of both Houses are no doubt considering ways in which to listen to the views of the public on the issues which they are investigating. Any initiative to provide information for the public should begin by understanding what information the public needs.

18. The Government recognises the importance of accurate information on the European Union being available to the public. Parliamentary debates and scrutiny play a vital role, not simply in policy formulation, but in informing the public about the EU’s work.

Memorandum from the Brethren Christian Fellowship

1. We have great respect for the work of the Lords EU Committee and its respective sub-Committees and are grateful for the opportunity to submit evidence on the present enquiry.

2. We agree that a focused enquiry, based around the different parliamentary models of communication is preferable to examining the European Union’s role in communicating with its citizens, which we consider to be biased.

GENERAL INITIATIVES AFFECTING NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

3. There is a lack of information about the EU, and what is available often is from a one-sided viewpoint, depending on the source of information. There is therefore, a crying need for substantial factual information on many important subjects. (see Appendix A).

4. The Commission’s Communication, COM (2005 494 Final), Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, is a biased and defective document and cannot be followed as a guideline. (see Appendix B).

5. More debate in National Parliaments on EU affairs is very desirable. The more fundamental need is increased effective powers in national Parliaments to control, direct and if necessary stop, EU legislative proposals.

INITIATIVES IN THE UK

6. The Lords EU Committees are to be greatly respected as broad minded and non-party assessors of EU matters.

7. How much more they can do needs careful consideration. Their commitments already are considerable.

8. Perhaps there would be value in a close, but non-political liaison, with a separate, independent body whose primary responsibility was to inform the public. The expertise of the Lords could be drawn on by such a body, without excessive demands on Lords’ time or hindering the work of the Committees.

9. Thus the Information Body would avoid duplication of the work already undertaken by Committees, but could draw on work already completed, and meanwhile could help the Lord’s by its factual expertise. The Body could also serve to disseminate the value of the Lord’s Committees Reports more widely to the citizen than it is now.

10. Such an Information Body could also provide information for MP’s, help to alert them to the significance of European issues, encourage them to participate in Commons debates on European matters, and help them to inform their constituents.

11. Anybody who has spoken to MP’s on EU matters or observed Commons debates on EU matters, (including attendance or lack of it) would likely confirm the need and desirability of efforts in that direction.
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The Information Body/Centre/Forum

12. The establishment of such a Body is of great importance, but also poses huge problems.
   (a) it must concentrate on factual investigation, plus objective assessments of the pros and cons, strong points and defects, of the subject considered,
   (b) it will often need to compare subjects across Europe, and the investigators will need great skills, including linguistic ones,
   (c) it must be independent of party political influence within the UK,
   (d) it must be independent of the EU Institutions, and their Information Centres,
   (e) it must be able to assess the reliability of statistics.

13. The Body can hardly be established without Government funding, but it must be able to work without fear that its funding will be at the mercy of political pressures.

14. Such a body could help in public consultation, and in informing Parliament of public reaction.

15. Conclusions

The present situation cries out for improvement;
   (a) the excellent work of the Lords EU Committees and the Commons Scrutiny Committees is very little known,
   (b) the coverage of EU affairs in the Commons is inadequate,
   (c) the public have been denied a major opportunity to become more aware of EU issues because the proposed referendum was aborted. No doubt much discussion before would have been partial, but public awareness would have risen,
   (d) the public feel widely that their lives are affected by a body to which they have no access, and which they do not understand.

16. A National Forum for the UK?

We therefore support the establishment of a Nation Centre/Forum. Our friends from Eire speak highly of the Irish National Forum for Europe, having contributed to its deliberations over a period of time. They have commented favourably on the impartiality of the Chairman and the friendly atmosphere of its proceedings in public. The variation of its venue also contributes to its accessibility to the general public.

APPENDIX A

Some Subjects of Importance an Independent Forum Could Investigate

17.1 a From what political tradition does the EU pattern of institutions derive?
   b Is it compatible with the political traditions of all, most or a few Member States?
   c More specifically, what are the differences between the functioning of our own UK Parliament and the European Parliament? Is the latter democratic?
   d What is the role of Committees in the European Parliament and how do they differ from our own Parliamentary Committees, and are their proceedings published?
   e What is the role of unelected officials in initiating legislation?

17.2 a Is there sufficient time allowed by the Commission, for adequate scrutiny of EU proposals by national Parliaments?
   b Can the proposals be overridden by national Parliaments?

17.3 What is the extent and degree of variation between Member States?
   a in the degree of detail in national laws which implement EU legislation,
   b in the national enforcement of this legislation,
   c in the pursuit of national policies in defiance of EU legislation
   d in ignoring European Court of Justice (ECJ) judgments and penalties?
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17.4 To what extent is a level “playing field” a reality in the practice of trade between Member States?

17.5 What is the degree of variation between Member States in:
   a fraud in the implementation of CAP?
   b corruption in national government and in administration?

17.6 Why cannot the EU get its accounts in the clear? Are the attitudes of Member States to corruption in public life so divergent that it is unreal to expect EU Institutions to be free, or largely free, of corrupt officials?

17.7 How serious is the bias in the ECJ towards an unending increase in the acquis communitaire. (eg the Environment Framework Decision and Criminal Justice case)

17.8 a Has one of the guiding principles of the EU been secularism?
   b Is this why liberty of conscience never appears in EU proposals and legislation save for military service?
   c Is this not bound to lead to the collision of EU laws with national legislation programmes which specifically provide for EU laws with freedom of religion and conscientious objection of?

18. The above questions represent only a small sample of the subjects which could be highlighted in a wide ranging debate on the EU. Our citizens need sound, factual and objective information of how the EU affects their everyday lives.

APPENDIX B

COMMISSION PLAN “D” 13 October 2005 (COM 2005/494) FINAL

19. “The European Commission has strongly supported the ratification of the Constitution and has provided assistance to all Member States with their information campaigns. . . . The Commission continues to consider that the Constitution would be an important step forward in making the European Union more democratic, transparent, effective and stronger to the outside world” (page 2)

20. Any vision of the future of Europe needs to build on a clear view on citizen’s needs and expectation. This is the purpose of Plan—D (page 2)

21. The loudest voice on citizen’s expectations in recent time has surely been the French and Dutch “No” votes. The first quote above shows the Commission has not adjusted its outlook in consequence at all.

22. “. . . public approval of the European Union has steadily decreased over recent months. Whether in terms of trust, image or assessment of EU membership, all the indicators have fallen. A similar decline is seen in the public approval of and trust in the national political process.”

23. “. . . yet, when questioned about the desired role of the European Union in five years time, 49 per cent would like to have a greater role, while only 14 per cent wish to see it less involved in key policy areas” (page 2)

24 This surely must be special pleading! If turnout to vote is any index, voting in elections to the European Parliament is way below voting in national elections, at least in some countries. The percentage figures in the second quote (49 per cent and 14 per cent) are unrecognisable for the UK.

“. . . the European Institutions are too often the scapegoat for unpopular decisions and are often seen as remote and bureaucratic. One of the main objectives of the period of reflection should be to stimulate a more accurate communication of the activities of the European Union” (page 3)

It appears that the Commission considers it is only the uninformed citizen that has got in wrong. The possibility that the European Institutions are remote and bureaucratic, or that the more accurate information on them might make the citizen even less satisfied with them, is given no credence.

Memorandum by Richard Corbett MEP

This submission does not intend to address all the questions contained in the Call for Evidence, but to give my views as an MEP on one of the questions raised, namely whether there is “really a lack of information about the EU as opposed to a lack of political engagement in EU matters”.

It is certainly true that there is plenty of information for those who are motivated enough to seek it out. It is also true that there is a lack of engagement in EU matters, just as in many other matters and in political processes generally. But what is distinctive about the debate on Europe in Britain in particular is the sheer volume of misinformation, often quite deliberately spread.
After all, in Britain we have a well-organised and financed anti-European campaign group, recently re-invented as the so-called “Open Europe” campaign. We have a written press which is overwhelmingly hostile to the EU: some 80 per cent of the national press, measured by circulation statistics, is hostile to the EU, a partial reflection of ownership patterns whereby two-thirds are owned by a small number of individuals who are each well known for their anti-European views. We also have a political debate in which a large number of politicians seek to gain mileage by exploiting public fears and doubts about the European Union.

The debate about Europe is therefore characterised, to a large degree, with simple misconceptions, endlessly repeated. Eurosceptics have discovered that deliberately incessant repetition of the same few myths (the Commission is all-powerful, Europe is undemocratic, we were only asked about joining a free trade area, the EU only legislates on insignificant technical details, the European Parliament is powerless) causes these myths to percolate their way into the public consciousness. This is despite the easy availability of factual material rebutting these myths. The problem is not the lack of political engagement by pro-EU voices, but the simple unwillingness of anti-Europeans to take any notice.

Further, newspapers are keen to print scare stories but reluctant to print corrections; so not only are our pages relatively full of untruths about Europe, but they are relatively bare of subsequent corrections. Stories proved to be inaccurate are either quietly dropped or simply continued regardless.

The myths fall into three main categories:

- **Cheap scare stories.** In late 2005, several newspapers ran a story about an alleged attempt by the Commission to replace the red ensign with the European Union flag on Britain’s merchant fleet. This story kept on cropping up long after the Commission had specifically denied any such intention. Several political figures vowed to fight this proposal long after they knew no such proposal existed.

- **Stories designed to make the EU look silly.** Just as pernicious are the tabloid inventions, intended not so much to scare readers but to make them more accustomed to laughing at EU politics than engaging with it. The famous straight bananas, bent cucumbers and even standardised condoms all fall into this category.

- **Stories that paint the EU as a menace to our way of life.** Our newspapers are full of letters alleging that it is the EU that requires us to devolve authority to the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments and obliges us to create regional assemblies in England. Equally, there are many stories to the effect that Britain is drowning in red tape caused by Brussels bureaucrats imposing rules and regulations on Britain.

What can the House of Lords do in such a context? Clearly it would not be easy for a Parliamentary body to organise a systematic rebuttal of myths and misinformation in the press or elsewhere, because it is not easy to draw a dividing line between partisan arguments and factual correction.

Nonetheless, the Lords is well placed to at least deal with some prominent euromyths, such as the volume of our legislation which is of European rather than national origin. Anti-Europeans regularly claim that more than 50 per cent, 70 per cent, or even 80 per cent of UK law originates in the EU, whereas the House of Commons library recently found the figure to be a mere 9 per cent. In the House of Lords, an EU committee would be well placed to issue an authoritative assessment of this, both in terms of volume and terms of nature: many matters that in a national context would be dealt with by statutory instruments are, at European level, subject to the full legislative procedure of the EU.

The Lords’ strength in this respect is that it is somewhat less partisan than the House of Commons. It is more independent of the governing majority and able to draw on a high level of expertise. These strengths should be deployed effectively.

The Lords should certainly make greater use of its own website, disseminating its own reports and evaluations and indeed in placing the Government’s explanatory memoranda on EU legislation on the net. It could, perhaps, more proactively seek out appropriate recipients for its reports in the specialist media and among NGOs.

It could press the Government to include information about the EU in the national curriculum. The curriculum should ensure that all pupils are aware of what local government does and how it works, what national government does and how it works, and what the European Union does and how it works.
The Lords should certainly give favourable consideration to participating in any system of near-simultaneous debates on the Commission’s annual work programme across national parliaments in all Member States, as recommended by the Conference of Speakers in Budapest. It should also give favourable consideration to any inter-parliamentary conferences that may be organised by the European Parliament in terms of furthering the debate in the context of the reflection period on the future of the EU constitution.

Memorandum from Mr Brendan Donnelly, Director, The Federal Trust
(Memorandum submitted in a Personal Capacity)

1. I understand that the deadline for submissions to the current House of Lords enquiry on the provision to the citizen of information regarding the European Union has been extended until 28 February. I should like to offer, in a personal capacity, comments on some of the questions contained in your “Call for Evidence” in regard to that enquiry. I should, however, like to begin my submission with a general observation.

2. While I do believe there is an important and worthwhile role for national parliaments to play in the workings and public discussion of the European Union, I believe that the second question you pose under the heading “General Initiatives affecting National Parliaments” goes to the heart of the matter of the relationship between the European Union and the citizen. In that question you ask whether there is really a “lack of information about the EU” or rather a “lack of political engagement in EU matters?” I am strongly persuaded that while the provision of timely and accurate information on the European Union is a highly desirable endeavour, the current malaise of the Union has deeper political roots, for which a number of national governments are primarily responsible. Throughout the European Union, for different reasons and with different emphases, many national governments have failed in their “political engagement” with the EU. They have given over that period inadequate, incoherent and sometimes misleading accounts of the European Union and its implications for their countries. National parliaments have taken their tone from their national governments, as indeed have national electorates. It is not, it seems to me, primarily raw information on the European Union which is lacking in national electorates, but rather a persuasive and coherent account of the nature, aspirations and functioning of the Union offered by their political elites (primarily governmental elites) to national electorates.

3. The United Kingdom and France provide two striking, but contrasting examples of this phenomenon. In the belief that the British public would harbour warmer feelings towards a European Union which more nearly reflected the “Anglo-Saxon” economic model, the British Government has over the past five years alternated between outspoken criticism of the European Union for its supposed failure to move towards this economic model and at best exaggerated claims that the rest of the Union, under British influence, was rapidly becoming more “Anglo-Saxon” in its economic structures. The French Government, on the other hand, fell into the opposite trap of presenting the European Union as an essentially protectionist arrangement, put at risk by the intrusion of “Anglo-Saxon” liberalism. Fear of the supposed success of Mr Blair and his alleged ally Mr Barroso in imposing their neo-liberal model of economic relations on the Union was a central factor in explaining the “no” vote in the French referendum on the Constitutional Treaty last year. On both sides of the Channel, national electorates are confused and uncertain about what the European Union is for, should be for and might be for. Until they have acceptable answers to these questions, they will find it very difficult to find a broader political context in which they can make sense of individual pieces of information, however objective, presented to them about the European Union.

4. There is a view that national governments are now presented with an impossible task in attempting to present the European Union in a way that will both command widespread support among their domestic electorate and yet do justice to the real workings of the Union. That European Union will indeed never correspond to either of the extreme wings of the economic argument currently represented by the United Kingdom and France. Yet politicians in both France and the United Kingdom are inextricably tempted to shore up their domestic political base by pretending otherwise. If over the next decade, national governments (of which the French and British were only taken above as examples—recent German and Italian governments have fared no better) can make a better job of developing for their national electorates a more persuasive and credible underlying political narrative regarding the European Union, then the provision of factual and timely information by the House of Lords or other national parliamentary bodies will make a definite contribution to an improved public debate. If no such persuasive narrative is developed (and it must primarily be national governments to do it), then the provision of detailed information on discrete and individual items of proposed European legislation will make little impact on the attitude towards the European Union of Europe’s national electorates.
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24 April 2006

GENERAL INITIATIVES AFFECTING NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

5. There seems no reason why national parliaments could not or should not discuss the Commission’s Annual Work Plan simultaneously throughout the European Union. It should be clear, however, that the primary role in the legislative process of the European Union for national parliaments is to scrutinise and hold to account their corresponding national government. It is emphatically not possible for national parliaments, either individually or corporately, to hold either the Council of Ministers or the European Commission to account. To claim, as some have, that the European Constitutional Treaty would have allowed national parliaments to do so, is misleading.

6. As to the role of national parliaments in explaining the workings of the European Union, envisaged in the European Commission’s Plan “D”, it should be accepted that such a role can much more easily be played in countries where there is a broad consensus among the political parties represented in a national parliament on issues relating to the European Union. No such consensus exists within the British Parliament. Whereas individual British Parliamentarians and differing British parties will certainly shape the British debate on Europe, the institutional role of the British “national parliament” will inevitably be coloured by the controversial nature of the European debate in this country.

INITIATIVES IN THE UK

7. The House of Lords is rightly recognised as an unrivalled source of information and lucid analysis on European topics throughout the European Union. Its impact on the approaches of political elites to European questions, in this country and elsewhere, is relatively high. Its impact on the broader public debate is noticeably less pronounced. It must of course be for the House of Lords to decide whether it is content with this state of affairs. But it would be difficult to argue that it would be constitutionally inappropriate for the House of Lords to seek a more direct link with the broader public in the continuing British debate on European issues. Questions of constitutional propriety would only genuinely emerge if the House of Lords sought to block specific decisions taken in the sphere of the European Union by the elected chamber.

8. It would certainly be a contribution to transparency if the House of Lords put the Government’s Explanatory Memoranda on EU legislation on its website. It should be observed, however, that these Memoranda are often less comprehensible to the general public than they are to those immersed in European affairs. If the House of Lords does seek the widest possible contact with the general public, perhaps consideration could be given to the possibility of “Press Briefings” or “Layman’s Guides” to accompany the Memoranda. Another possibility to widen the outreach of the House of Lords might be the establishment of “Joint Committees” with the House of Commons. Ideally, such committees might be able to combine the expertise and analytical force of the House of Lords with the political legitimacy and guaranteed access to publicity of the House of Commons.

EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE

9. In a recent study, the Federal Trust, together with the One World Trust and Democratic Audit, recommended the setting up of a “European Audit Office” for the provision of impartial analysis on the implications of proposed European legislation. It might be argued that the desirability of such an office would be lessened by the provision on the House of Lords website of the Explanatory Memoranda relating to proposed legislation. It has, however, already been pointed out (above) that these Memoranda are not always entirely accessible to the general public. It might well be that a “European Audit Office” would be a better provider of easily digestible and impartial information than the government departments responsible for the Memoranda of Explanation.

10. Given the highly controversial nature of all matters relating to the European Union in this country, it would be important for the “European Audit Office” to interpret its role strictly. If it did so, then there is no obvious reason why it should not be of great help to Parliament and public. It is difficult, however, to imagine any political consensus within the United Kingdom for setting up of any more ambitious forum for European discussion such as the Irish National Forum.

28 February 2006
Memorandum from P R E Double, Remembrancer, City Remembrancer, Guildhall

This short letter responds to the notice of the Committee’s inquiry into the role the House of Lords might play in explaining further matters relating to the EU.

The City of London takes a keen interest in the development of the EU agenda including the impact of European legislation on the UK’s financial services sector. With the volume of legislation emanating from Brussels which now passes through Parliament, the City has experienced difficulty in ascertaining what instruments are being considered, when they are being considered and, on occasion, what the practical implications would be for UK interests.

My office has been fortunate enough to be included on the Cabinet Office distribution of Government Explanatory Memoranda (EMs) produced by departments. These usefully set out the Government’s position and are, of course, public documents but I doubt whether many interested parties either know of their existence or how to obtain them. It would be useful, therefore, if there was a central depository of these EMs accessible by the wider public, perhaps on the internet recognising, of course, that is a matter for discussion whether the House or the Government should provide this service. There was an intention, I believe, on the part of the Cabinet Office, to establish a central list of all EMs published but this has not so far materialised.

In addition to the providing the facility to access EMs, there is also scope for further development of the Parliamentary website to put the inquirer on notice of what the European Committees in both Houses intend to consider in forthcoming meetings. I appreciate that this information is already largely provided on the Committees’ own websites but, to the less informed, it is unlikely to be discovered easily. The current European page linked from the index of the central Parliamentary website does little more than provide “useful links” to general background information, the Committees’ website or to lists of documents which may mean little to them. A more dedicated subsidiary website could, perhaps, provide a snap shot of the instruments due to be considered during the forthcoming week (or month) along with links to EMs, other evidence that may have been received from interested parties, and suggestions on how the citizen could engage with the Committee.

I am sorry not to have provided a fuller note but unfortunately time constraints have not allowed me to do so. Nevertheless I hope these brief observations will be of some assistance.

3 February 2006

Memorandum from Andrew Duff MEP, Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

General Initiatives Affecting National Parliaments

1. Members of the House of Lords can be expected to play a key role in supporting the latest initiative in presenting and explaining European Union affairs. This is the establishment of a new series of “Parliamentary Forums” whose goal is to help shape, step by step, a resolution of the constitutional crisis. The idea of a joint initiative by the European and national parliaments was discussed, and approved by COSAC at its London meeting in October 2005 and formally proposed by the European Parliament in its resolution of 19 January 2006.¹

2. The first Parliamentary Forum, which is scheduled for 8–9 May, has an agenda-setting role for the remainder of the period of reflection. The European Parliament is proposing that the conference should work on the following items of business:

(a) to debate among parliamentarians, both national and European, the scale and nature of the constitutional crisis, as well as to hear contributions from the Commission and Council;

(b) to “identify a limited number of priority questions about the future of Europe and the governance of the Union which should be addressed in subsequent Forums and in the broader public debate”. Initially, the Parliament suggests six specific questions, as follows:-

(i) what is the goal of European integration?

(ii) what role should Europe have in the world?

(iii) in the light of globalisation, what is the future of the European social and economic model?

(iv) how do we define the boundaries of the European Union?
(v) how do we enhance freedom, security and justice?
(vi) how do we finance the Union?

(c) to aim to make “comprehensive recommendations” to the European Council of June “about how the Union should proceed to find the way out of the crisis”.

3. Although these Forums have no official constitutional status, they will enjoy—as the Convention previously—a strong parliamentary legitimacy. It is to be hoped that the first Forum will be able to establish a clear majority view about the future schedule and content of its successors.

4. The European Parliament hopes that the Parliamentary Forums will “prepare the ground for reform of the common policies in those areas where dissension exists”. It does not want the Forums to open up the whole of the constitutional package to amendment but, rather, to debate the reform of the EU’s common policies in a constitutional context. In other words, the debate has to be related directly to overcoming the constitutional crisis, and “policy prescriptions at EU level must relate directly to the rules, powers and procedures of the EU institutions as well as to the competences conferred on the EU”.

5. The publication of “European Papers” is a key element of the Parliament’s strategy. The purpose of these is to be used “as a common European template for the national debates and … as the basis for the deliberations of the Parliamentary Forums”. National parliaments are also expected to make their own contributions which should be published alongside those of the European Parliament on the Forum website.

6. Parliament proposes that the Forum should also make a call for proposals for European Papers from social partners, civil society, and, in particular, from Europe’s political parties. These also would be published on the website.

7. Parliament also suggests that member states organise a large number of public meetings and media debates on the future of Europe—“Citizens’ Forums”—at national, regional and local level, structured along the commonly agreed themes, with the assistance of the Commission. It urges the social partners and civil society organisations to get engaged in these debates. And it expects political parties to give much more prominence to the European dimension in both their internal debates and electoral campaigning.

8. I do not believe that the European Commission’s famous “Plan D” has much of a life-chance if it is not dedicated to salvaging the Constitution. It is unreasonable to expect the citizen to be much interested in EU affairs unless he and she are offered the eventual prospect of changing EU policy. An attempted public debate without a focus on a political decision risks being nebulous. That is why the European Parliament has tried to provide a target to the constitutional debate which is, in effect, the renegotiation of the treaty. MEPs will certainly take part in the proposed Citizens’ Forums in their own and other Member States. National MPs and peers will do so according to their own level of political commitment to the Constitution and their own predilections about its modification. In the UK, the active participation of members of the House of Lords in these debates will add knowledge and authority.

9. In addition to annual debates by national parliaments on the Commission’s legislative programme, I would advocate a dedicated debate on the Commission’s annual report on subsidiarity. Such an event would be a good chance to quiz members of the Commission on their past performance as well as their future intentions.

INITIATIVES IN THE UK

10. In the complete absence of any government campaign to convert public or media opinion about Britain’s relationship with the European Union it is difficult to identify a special role for the Lords. As the main problem seems to be a failure by the national political parties to enter upon a European discourse, the House of Lords (where party is less hegemonic than in the Commons) may find itself at a particular disadvantage.

11. One underused conduit between the British public and the EU dimension is the British delegation in the European Parliament. Any initiative that succeeded in combining more closely the work of MEPs and the work of peers on EU issues would serve to enhance public interest in Europe. I am very much in favour of the ideas being floated by the Leader of the House of Commons to create a joint forum for debate on EU matters between MEPs, peers and MPs.

12. I have followed the admirable work of the Irish National Forum for Europe and other comparable initiatives in other member states. However, what is possible in a small state is clearly very much more difficult in a large one. I would hope that if the period of reflection experiment of Citizens’ Forums is successful a more
permanent national conversation will have been launched. In that context, the continuing, informed and judicious scrutiny of EU affairs by the House of Lords will be invaluable.

6 February 2006

Memorandum from Mára Dzirniece, Head of The Saeima EU Information Centre, Parliament of Latvia

1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

There are a number of advantages to Parliament communicating and explaining EU matters to the public: it has access to all information coming from Brussels and national government on EU affairs. As a democratic institution close to the people it can serve as a reliable source of information, representing various different views.

The Saeima EU Information Centre (Centre) was established in November 1997 under the auspices of the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia) European Affairs Committee (EAC). (The EAC itself was established two years earlier, in 1995). The Danish Parliament EU Information Centre served as an example or role model.

2. REGULATIONS

The objectives and tasks of the Centre are laid down in an internal document of Parliament: the Regulations of the EU Information Centre. The Regulations are approved by the Presidium (political body) of the Saeima. The Regulations state that the objective of the Centre is to provide the Saeima and general public with impartial, factual information about European affairs and the implications of Latvia’s membership of the European Union.

3. STAFF

Non-political staff

The employees of the Centre are required to have previous media or public relations experience and a relevant academic background (EU politics or law).

According to the Regulations the Director of the Saeima Chancellery appoints the Head of Centre after receiving recommendations of the EAC chairperson.

Currently there are four staff employees (advisers; including Head of Centre) and three freelance employees (undergraduate students working on contractual basis full time) at the Centre.

4. POLITICAL IMPARTIALITY

Although all political parties elected to the Saeima (currently eight) have declared to be pro-European before accession to the EU, it is likely that some political parties might position themselves as euro-sceptics in the next general elections.

There already exists diversity of interpretation on European matters.

(For example, whether to refer to Christianity in the Preamble of European Constitution).

In practice pro-European or euro-sceptic attitudes/movements have never influenced the Centre’s work. First of all, as it is stated in the Regulations, our task is to serve as a reliable and impartial source of information to the citizen. (We always have to quote both sides/ positive and negative aspects).

Secondly the Saeima (i.e. the EAC) controls/ scrutinises Government European policy. Therefore information disseminated by the Centre can contain different opinions, also critical views. (for example, the EAC raised its concerns about Government’s critically slow progress achieved in implementation of the Schengen acquis communautaire. The Centre prepared a press release on this issue and draw public/media attention).
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5. FINANCE

The Centre has its own budget (separate from the EAC budget).

For the first years (1998–99) the Centre received considerable funding from the EU Phare programme.

Before accession to the EU the Centre took part in different public information co-operation projects (for example, with the Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia and European Parliament Information bureau in Latvia).

But in order to secure impartiality and reliability of information that the Centre provides to general public, we consider that the best practice is to stay financially independent, since the position of Parliament, Brussels (Commission) and even national government may differ on various issues.

6. ACTIVITIES

The Centre carries out activities in three major “fields”:

— Prepares weekly bulletin “Eiroziņas” (Euronews) on EU issues and other publications;
— Maintains multifunctional web page www.eiroinfo.lv and the Saeima specialised EU information system;
— Operates hotline/phone in service Eiroinfo 7211111.

Eiroziņas and publications

In written communication we always try to be reader-friendly. We avoid euroslang. Text should always be precise and easy to understand without unnecessary general phrases.

Since 1998 the Centre has published a weekly bulletin “Eiroziņas” (Euronews). Initially it was the Saeima internal publication. Since 1999 it has been distributed free of charge to readers in municipalities, line ministries, libraries, etc throughout Latvia.

The bulletin mainly focuses on issues concerning Latvia’s membership to the EU and the Saeima involvement in European affairs.

The Centre prepares press releases after each EAC meeting (most of them are open) and disseminates them to media, as well as informing journalists about forthcoming issues to be examined at the EAC meetings.

The possibility to be present and follow the work of the EAC gives an insight into the development of European affairs. (The EAC approves national positions presented by Government prior to negotiations in Brussels).

The Centre prepares on average ten fact sheets annually on various issues. Most of them are published electronically in Latvian and Russian on our webpage.

We pay much attention to issues that attract public interest (we can indicate these issues via a hotline service—a lot of questions are coming in on a certain subject. A recent example was the directive on Community resident status). Our task is to foresee such forthcoming issues and prepare all necessary information (fact sheets, articles) on the matter in advance.

Internet

www.eiroinfo.lv

Around two-thirds of Centre’s budget has been allocated to develop Internet home page and specialised EU database over the two last years. Our home page is in three languages: Latvian, English and Russian.

On our home page people can find useful information: news, fact sheets containing practical info (for example, European insurance, taxes, travel information, etc), contact information and useful links as well as treaties and other documents. Home page info is updated every working day.
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The database is publicly accessible from our home page. It contains EU legislation in Latvian, minutes from the EAC meetings, national positions (access reserved just for the Saeima), written answers prepared on Eiroinfo 7211111 enquiries.

In future we plan to develop other Internet projects, for example, a quiz on EU for schoolchildren.

Hotline Eiroinfo 7211111

Since January 2003 Centre is offering a phone in/hotline service Eiroinfo 7211111 for citizens to provide quick and impartial responses to questions on European affairs.

The service is provided in cooperation with Contact Centre 1188—operator service and inquiry service provider C1 (daughter enterprise of Lattelekom). Eiroinfo 7211111 is operational Sun-Sat, twenty-four hours a day. People can send their enquiries by e-mail eiroinfo@saeima.lv or via our homepage.

We maintain a database in co-operation with Contact Centre 1188 on frequently asked questions and questions that may be of public interest and that can be answered immediately. The operators use this database when answering calls. If a question is complicated and requires additional search it is sent to Centre. Eiroinfo staff—freelance employees—prepare written answers.

In order to prepare information we contact specialists at ministries or experts in the EU institutions as well as we used our SERID database and Internet resources. Usually it takes one working day to prepare an answer. On average we prepare 10–15 written answers per day. The total since 2003 is 14,000.

7. WHO USES OUR SERVICE?

The Centre serves both parliament deputies and staff as well as the general public. Statistics and type of enquiries show that users represent various social/age/professional groups.

8. PROMOTION

The Saeima has allocated a small amount of money for promotion of Eiroinfo 7211111 service. We have had two campaigns carried out by an advertising company.

9. MONITORING

The Centre informs the chairman of the EAC about planned activities, as well as Centre reports twice a year to the EAC.

There is regular feedback from readers. As well as a clear indicator are number of enquiries received via Eiroinfo 7211111. If the service is poor, people will not ask our assistance.

10. CO-OPERATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Over the years we had very close bilateral contacts with similar EU information centres in the Danish and Lithuanian parliaments.

Last year we established contacts with Europe Information network in Finland. It was decided to organise an informal meeting with colleagues in the Baltic Sea region—Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland.

The meeting was held in Helsinki in June. It was recognised that though in each country the institutional framework and solutions on EU information differs, we share common views on accessibility, transparency and impartiality of information.

It was decided to establish a tradition of annual meetings. This year the meeting will be held in Riga.

3 February 2006
EU Legislation—Public Awareness of the Scrutiny Role of the House of Lords

24 April 2006

Memorandum from the European Commission Representation in the UK

The European Commission Representation in the UK welcomes this enquiry. It is the Commission’s stated policy that national parliaments should play as full a role in possible in ensuring that matters relating to the European Union are clearly and objectively explained to the citizen. We are working actively in the UK to offer all assistance to ensure that national parliaments are able to give that mission practical expression.

The formal procedures for information exchange and consultation with national parliaments, both individually and collectively, are well known, operate well and have been addressed by Commissioner Wallström in her submission. I am therefore confining my comments to the part of your enquiry exploring initiatives in the UK specifically.

The European Parliament and national MEPs, as elected representatives, clearly have a democratic link to and relationship with national parliaments that the European Commission—as the executive—does not. It is not the role of the UK Representation of the EC to comment on whether it is appropriate for the House of Lords to play a greater role in communicating EU policy, beyond noting that there is a link between information and political engagement. As Commissioner Wallström notes in her submission there is no lack of information available. Yet there does seem to be a systemic failure when trying to get this information across. In the most recent Eurobarometer poll (Autumn 2005) 18 per cent of those polled professed to know “nothing at all” about the EU—twice the EU25 average, 19 per cent said they “need to know a lot more” and 38 per cent “would like to know some more”.

Thus national parliaments therefore can play a significant role in EU communication and would seem ideally placed to do so since the public see parliamentarians as the primary representative of the political process in the UK.

In the UK, the EU tends to be seen as part of an external, rather than domestic political agenda, which arguably adds to the public perception that Europe happens “abroad” and that the EU’s institutional and political processes cannot be directly influenced by public opinion. In the media, EU events are routinely reported as “foreign” news stories and the Brussels correspondent is typically part of the foreign desk. Similarly the lead Government department, generally-speaking, is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This is reflected in the fact that Members of Parliament often pass constituent enquiries regarding the EU directly to MEPs. There is no formal, generalised mechanism in the House of Lords (beyond committee scrutiny) for EU policy information to be mainstreamed into the general work of the House. As a consequence, only the dedicated and interested have any thorough-going knowledge of the EU and EU affairs risks becoming the realm of the specialist.

In practical terms, the UK Representation, if called upon to do so, would be very happy to assist the House of Lords in exploring practical measures to improve the provision and dissemination of factual information to all Members. Also to help with all initiatives designed to make the EU fully relevant to the work of all parliamentarians and, of course, to assist the EU Select Committee in making their enquiries even more efficacious.

As an example, there might be scope for strengthening the Commission visits programme (which may be funded by both the House and the Commission) more widely. With advance planning to ensure a high-quality programme provided by Brussels, this might encourage greater take up across all committees/party groupings and ensure that the meetings in Brussels are properly focused, informative and useful. In the case of visits made in the context of taking evidence for specific enquiries, the scope of the visitors’ programme could perhaps be widened, as appropriate, to include general information sessions on matters of parallel interest to Committee members.

Moreover, closer co-ordination between the Brussels institutions—the Commission as well as parliament—through the creation of formal or informal planning mechanisms, could give a wider platform to those EU experts who are invited to give evidence and, working through them, to allow their evidence to find a wider audience. In this context, the UK Representation stands ready to share planning information so as to enable the UK Representation, working with the support of the House of Lords, to introduce those Commission officials invited to give evidence to a wider audience than public committee hearings can provide.

The Representation of the Commission in the UK stands ready to appoint a member of staff directly responsible for answering the information requests of the Committee, and indeed Parliament, in general.


2 Eurobarometer 64—UK National Report Q. A20 (p.35) & Q A21 p.36.
Building on the EU Select Committee’s work already undertaken with the Commission’s Work and Legislative Programmes, and its many inquiries into policy matters, the Commission could help enhance the work of Parliament in this field and could give added-value to the House of Lords in explaining the EU more effectively to the public.

The Committee might also like to consider whether broadcasting public enquiries by the Lords EU Select Committee on the European by Satellite (EBS) channel as well as BBC Parliament and by webcast would also help bring information into a wider public sphere.

Letter from the Hon. Chairman of the Freedom Association to the European Union Committee

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE HON. CHAIRMAN OF THE FREEDOM ASSOCIATION, ASHLEYMOTE MEP AND MARGOT WALLSTRÖM, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

I understand that your Committee are inviting submissions about explaining EU related matters to the citizen.

Enclosed herewith please find copies of the correspondence between myself, in my capacity as Hon. Chairman of The Freedom Association, and Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Union Commission. Also enclosed is a copy of a letter from the Commissioner to Ashley Mote MEP dated 12 December 2005 but not received in his office until 23 January 2006.

It will be apparent to you from this correspondence that there is a great reluctance on the part of Margot Wallström to accept the invitation which has been extended to her to address a public meeting in the United Kingdom and your Committee might consider this to be contrary to its aims of ensuring that the EU is “clearly and objectively explained to the citizen”.

I look forward to receiving your confirmation that this correspondence will be placed before the members of the EU Select Committee and perhaps, in due course, you would be kind enough to send me the relevant Hansard report.

Letter from the Hon. Chairman of the Freedom Association to Margot Wallström, Vice President of the European Committee

Further to the correspondence that you have received from Ashley Mote MEP I am writing to introduce the Freedom Association and also to confirm our willingness to host a meeting for you here in the United Kingdom sometime next year (2006).

I understand that following exchanges in committee between yourself and Mr Mote you agreed to accept his invitation to speak at a meeting, or meetings, of opinion formers in the UK who do not support the concept of European Union. If you would be kind enough to suggest dates when you would be available we will endeavour to book a suitable venue.

For your information the Freedom Association is a strictly non-partisan political pressure group which is unique amongst pressure groups in that it is most definitely not single issue. In defence of freedom and democracy we have a very wide remit which means that we have a legitimate interest in just about every aspect of national life but, that being said, our greatest interest is in the restoration of political freedom.

If there is any further information that you require we will be pleased to oblige.

Letter from Margot Wallström to Mr Christopher Gill, the Hon. Chairman of the Freedom Association

Thank you for your kind invitation to take part in a meeting with the Freedom Association next year.

As I have underlined to Ashley Mote, I am happy to address a mixed audience to debate the future of Europe.

My agenda for 2006 is not yet confirmed, but I will be sure to ensure that you are invited to any public debates that I hold during my visits to the United Kingdom.

November 2005
Letter from Mr Christopher Gill to Margot Wallström

Thank you for your letter of the 16 December 2005 regarding a public meeting in the UK.

We are more than happy to think in terms of a “mixed” audience if by that you mean allowing both supporters and non-supporters of European Union to attend. In point of fact we believe that it is far more likely that you will encounter a cross-section of opinion by leaving the organisation of the meeting to such as ourselves rather than deputing the London office of the EU to make the arrangements, in which case you will probably find yourself addressing a virtually hand picked meeting of sycophants.

It is a well known fact that the EU has definite problems with the UK and hence the need for yourself and other Commissioners to face your critics and argue your case. The opportunity to do this is precisely what Ashley Mote MEP and the Freedom Association are offering you the opportunity to do.

If I might again respectfully request some dates from you that would be helpful in terms of making the necessary arrangements and not least so as to give advance publicity to what is potentially going to be a very important occasion.

6 January 2006

Letter from Margot Wallström to Mr Ashley Mote MEP

Thank you for your letter and subsequent e-mails offering to organise meetings in the United Kingdom.

As I outlined in my presentation to the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, I regularly hold open meetings which bring together a range of different views on Europe. For example: during the first Plan-D event in Prague on 1 November, I took questions from 120 people at a Café Babel public event. In Berlin, I even had a “pub-meeting”.

I cannot yet say when I will visit the United Kingdom next year. I can, however, assure you that I will hold similar open meetings and will inform you once a firmer date has been confirmed.

12 December 2005

Memorandum from Senator Maurice Hayes, Chairman of Ireland’s National Forum on Europe

INTRODUCTION

1. The National Forum On Europe was established in 2001 to facilitate discussion on Ireland’s membership of the European Union and to debate the future of Europe.

2. Members of the Oireachtas (Parliament) and those nominated by political parties in the Oireachtas make up the membership of the Forum. A Special Observer Pillar comprising representatives of civil society and the Social Partners also have speaking rights at the Forum. Members of the European Parliament, including those from Northern Ireland, have attendance and speaking rights. Political parties from Northern Ireland can be, and a number are, members of the Special Observer Pillar.

3. The Chairman of the Forum is independent Senator Maurice Hayes who, together with a Steering Committee and an independent Secretariat, are responsible for the management of the Forum’s business.

4. To date the Forum has held fifty-nine plenary meetings, 36 regional meetings and six national conferences. The full range of issues on the European Union’s agenda has been discussed. The Chairman has produced five consensus reports which have given a flavour of the debates and the issues of interest and concern in an impartial way. In addition, the Forum has produced a range of information materials designed to stimulate debate.

What resources are needed to run the Forum and how is it funded?

5. The National Forum On Europe is an independent agency which receives its funding from Government. The budget of the Forum in 2005 was €1.3 million and is €1.49 million in 2006. The resources are allocated in the Vote of the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister).

6. The staff of the Forum is seconded primarily from the Departments (Ministries) of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs. Core staff currently number five with a media consultant and a stagiaire bringing the complement to seven.
7. The resources allocated to the Forum cover all expenses including for salaries, publications, travel and meetings. Delegations can claim a research/secretarial allowance. The offices of the Forum are located in Dublin Castle and these are supplied without charge by the Government. The facilities of the Castle are available to the Forum for plenary meetings and other meetings, also without charge.

8. The Forum operates a website and produces user-friendly films and publications, including a series of Chairman’s reports which command consensus across the political spectrum.

9. The European Parliament has sponsored the work of the Forum through providing prizes to the winners of the schools competition.

What is the commitment in terms of Members’ time?

10. The time commitment that political parties and the observer members give to the National Forum On Europe is a matter for the political party members and observers themselves. Some are very committed to the Forum and give it significant time. Members who are also on the Steering Committee generally write briefs on upcoming topics, attend and prepare reports of plenary sessions for party members, in addition to attending regional and youth Forum sessions. Members of the Observer Pillar may also prepare briefs before a plenary meeting, seek views and get approval for the interventions they will make in addition to preparing reports of proceedings for circulation to their members. Members and observers may also make submissions to the Forum, enter into partnerships for specific events and assist with the youth programme and special events. All of this can involve a significant time commitment.

11. At the other end of the scale, members of the Forum may confine their participation to attending plenary session meetings. As the Forum has decided to hold approximately five plenary sessions between September 2005 and June 2006, and these sessions are generally two hours long, followed by lunch, the minimum time commitment, if a Member was to attend all five plenary sessions only, could be as low as ten hours in the period. Of course, not all members are required to attend all plenary sessions, so the time commitment of some members could be even lower.

What is the practical impact of the Forum on debates in Ireland on European issues and how is this impact assessed?

12. While it is hard to assess, it is the general view that after the No vote in the first referendum on the Treaty of Nice in 2001, the National Forum On Europe was instrumental in clarifying that no political party or group in Ireland was opposed to enlargement. The Forum then provided the space to discuss and analyse the underlying concerns reflected in the No vote. These concerns included the lack of a rigorous system of parliamentary scrutiny of EU legislation and perceived threats to Ireland’s traditional policy of neutrality. The Government addressed these issues, including through legislation and a European Council Declaration, before it called a second referendum. The fifteen per cent increase in the turnout at the second referendum on the Treaty of Nice is a measure for which the work of the Forum can claim a portion of the credit.

13. During its next stage the Forum interacted with the deliberations of the European Convention and facilitated debate on the various stages of the Convention’s work. Then, in the period following agreement on the European Constitution, the Forum facilitated debate on the implications of the Constitution. Currently, the Forum is debating a wide range of issues of concern to citizens during this period of reflection. Since its foundation, therefore, the Forum has continued to respond to the need to debate European issues.

14. Other indicators of success for the Forum include:
   — all the political parties represented in the Oireachtas (Parliament) across the political spectrum continue to support and participate in the work of the Forum;
   — Government ministers, party leaders and members across the political spectrum continue to be willing to address the Forum and engage in debate;
   — the Taoiseach has said that the Forum will have a key role to play during the period of reflection;
   — the Forum has attracted high calibre speakers from Europe and beyond, for example the President of the European Commission, Mr José Manuel Barroso, and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan;
   — participating members in the Observer Pillar of the Forum continue to express support for the Forum’s work;
What problems has the Forum encountered thus far?

15. Following the No votes in referenda in France and the Netherlands, and with the postponement of the referendum in Ireland which was expected in the Autumn, 2005, the Forum found that it was a challenge to get members of the public to attend public meetings. The Steering Committee of the Forum therefore decided to seek partnerships, especially with its observer pillar organisations, and tailor its debates to the specific concerns of these organisations. A number of these partnerships has been very successful already, especially that with the National Youth Council of Ireland. Building new partnerships is, nonetheless, a process that takes time. The Forum is currently working to build up these partnerships to ensure adequate audiences and appropriate venues for debate.

16. National media coverage of the work of the Forum has been sporadic and the challenge in achieving serious national media coverage should not be underestimated.

Would such a forum fit in the British political culture and if so how might it be introduced?

17. Ireland’s National Forum On Europe was inspired by previous Fora which dealt with Northern Ireland: the New Ireland Forum in 1983 and 1984 and the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation which was active between 1994 and 1996 and which was reconvened in 2002 and 2003. These Fora played a key role in the gradual creation of dialogue between the different political traditions on the island of Ireland. They were part of the peace process that led to the Good Friday Agreement.

18. The membership of the National Forum On Europe consists of all the political parties represented in the Oireachtas (Parliament) with the smaller parties given larger representation. In addition, a Special Observer Pillar enables civil society organisations, the Social Partners and others active on European Union issues to participate in the debate.

19. Critical success factors for the National Forum On Europe are its:

— political inclusiveness;
— independent Chair;
— balance and impartiality in presenting the debate;
— openness to social partners and civil society;
— outreach to regions, and its
— dedicated budget.

20. However, whether the model provided by the National Forum On Europe in Ireland would translate into another political culture is a question that can be answered only by those who have an intimate knowledge of their own political environment.
21. More detailed background material accompanies this response. In addition you may wish to visit our website www.forumoneurope.ie.

Memorandum from Dr Philipp Kiiver, LLM, Assistant Professor, Maastricht University

FORGET THE TERM “NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS”

In response to your call for evidence on the role of national parliaments in the European Union, I am writing to you as a constitutional law scholar from the Netherlands. In my submission I shall focus on the “General Initiatives affecting National Parliaments”.

1. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “THE” NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

It is up to each Member State of the European Union to define what constitutional role should be attributed to legislative organs, lower chambers, upper chambers, and regional assemblies. Also, each parliament acts within the confines of its own Member State, targeting its own national audience. What foreign parliaments do is irrelevant to the British public. The British will not perceive of the EU as being more democratic or transparent if 24 other parliaments hold simultaneous debates. To attribute separate national parliaments any collective role would be highly misleading. British debate should remain focused on British parliamentary practice only.

2. DEBATE REQUIRES OPPOSITION, NOT PARLIAMENTS AS SUCH

The European Commission attempts to recruit national parliaments to communicate, present and explain Europe to the citizens by way of open debates. That, however, misses the premises of parliamentary deliberation. Parliamentary debates should not be a PR festival in favour of the European Union. Debate requires competing agendas and opinions, and there will be no debate where a consensus prevails. It is therefore not the national parliament as such that fosters debate, but the existing opposition to Government policy in European affairs. Debate on Europe depends on the willingness of MPs to challenge the Government. The same holds true for upper houses of parliament.

3. KEEPING EUROPEAN SCRUTINY A DOMESTIC ISSUE

The House of Lords need not be instrumentalised to “sell” the European integration project to the citizens of the UK. It need not hold any artificial debates for the sake of debate or communication where there is no real controversy either. Yet it is perfectly appropriate for a national parliamentary chamber to scrutinise draft EU decisions where a cleavage does exist, and where national stakes are high. The purpose of such scrutiny is then to influence Government policy and enforce domestic transparency, not to increase the popularity of the European Union.

1 February 2006

Memorandum from Ray Kirtley, International Resource Centre for Schools and Colleges

1. BACKGROUND

This submission will focus on the theme:

“Is there a lack of information about the EU as opposed to a lack of political engagement in EU matters?”

1.1 The submission is particularly orientated towards the provision of information for the school and college sectors. The UK benefited from the existence of a network of European Resource Centres for Schools and Colleges (ERCs) from 1997–2003. These were funded by the European Commission and managed local providers with an established background in the provision of information about Europe. Network management was devolved to the British Council. When funding from the EU ended the DfES was given the option of funding the service. This idea was rejected by the DfES for England but the services were maintained by the jurisdictions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
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1.2 Host organisations for ERCs included Local Education Authorities, HE institutions and the British Council. Typically a region might handle 2000 enquiries p.a. (Yorkshire and the Humber 2001). The enquiries became more complex as the network evolved. ERC workers developed a unique skill set which combined a librarian’s knowledge of the EU with an in-depth understanding of the curriculum 4–18 and especially of how it may be enriched by a European or international dimension. Building up such a workforce was one of the key achievements of the ERC network. ERC workers were also in a unique position to appreciate how working internationally at any level can have a motivating effect for young people and help in raising their achievement as well as broadening their horizons.

2. Current Demand for EU Information from Schools and Colleges

2.1 The end of the ERC network for England did not extinguish the demand from schools. This continued demand was evident at the centres which remained open (but with other remits). Some centres continued an ad hoc regional service on a voluntary basis, others restricted access to their services to schools in the hosting Local Authority only. Both categories of centre found themselves dealing with enquiries from other regions where the centre had closed completely. Current enquiries to the centre at the University of Hull broadly fall into the following categories:

- Requests for resources and materials for pupils of all phases (the greatest number of enquiries).
- Requests for the loan of materials to support European Days or Weeks plus ideas to help teachers plan these events and integrate them into the curriculum.
- Advice and information on EU-funded school projects plus help with finding school partners (for primary schools this is frequently linked to the introduction of the Primary Languages Strategy).

2.2 Prior to 2002 the ERC network had access to a wide range of booklets, maps and other educational materials about the EU which were published by the UK Representation of the European Commission for a UK audience. These publications are now out of date or out of print. The residual centres are restricted to using materials supplied by the UK Office of the European Parliament (which are not produced in quantity) or using EU materials which, being for a wider EU audience, are not curriculum linked or especially suited to UK schools. Remaining centres have great difficulty in funding personnel, postage and other costs associated with these enquiries.

2.3 Since the closure of the ERC network the DfES has developed a new website—the Global Gateway—which is managed by the British Council and which was marketed as including a replacement for ERC services. However, the site has no identifiable European focus and cannot be used to order or borrow resources. One of the qualities which teachers valued about the ERC network was the ability of ERC workers to respond appropriately to the needs of a school and to help develop the international profile of that school. Many schools were also brought into the EU funded Comenius School Projects through developing their contacts with the ERC. (The UK currently is under-subscribed in this area and consistently fails to allocate its EU funding allocation). Others were helped towards gaining International School Award status (the DfES would now like all schools to gain this accreditation).

2.4 Another alternative open to schools is to access the public library network. Larger libraries will usually offer European information but this is orientated to the general public and to business users and has few applications for schools. Few libraries stock the EU range of school publications and it is not within their remit to help schools obtain supplies of such resources. Several ERCs made useful links with School Library Services to help with the distribution of European Treasure Chests (funded by the European Parliament). This scheme ended on a regional basis with the demise of the ERC network so depriving many small rural schools of access to quality resources.

3. Proposals for the Reinstatement of the ERC Network

3.1 Much of the original rationale for the establishment of the network in 1997 is still applicable:

- More than half of 18–24 year-olds polled by ICM knew little or nothing about the EU;
- 6% think that the US is a member of the EU;
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— 25% do not know that Britain is a member.

(Source: TES, 15 March 2002)

“There are too many people in Britain, including a lot of young people, who do not really know about the EU. More should be done to teach pupils about Europe. That is not promoting any particular policy on Europe, but every school pupil is a European. It is vital that young people engage”.

Peter Hain, Minister for Europe, March 2002

(Source: FCO)

3.2 The concept of a new core service for ERCs would formalise some of the current ad hoc developments into a coherent specification for a regional service for schools and colleges. This would also help to complement and support two other existing regional networks:

The DfES funded Regional Network for the International Dimension in Learning: This is a teacher training initiative which is managed by the British Council and funds training, conferences and information about British Council programmes and the International School Award. Current funding is approximately £12,000 per region. The network operates in England and Wales and in several instances providers also hosted ERCs. The network does not have the capacity to provide European information although it may initiate training courses on the school linking programmes and on the International Schools Award.

The Enabling Effective Support Network for the Global Dimension in Education: This is funded by the Department for International Development and has the role of raising awareness of global issues in schools (UK wide). It does not have a remit to provide information about other EU countries.

3.3 From the point of view of educators a gap exists for enquiries for information about Europe covering a range of themes:

— General enquiries about Europe;
— The European Union;
— EU policy and programmes;
— The European Parliament;
— Curriculum led questions;
— Requests for resources or to borrow materials.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 This submission aims to illustrate the need for a new network to fill a gap in information provision for school and college students. Statistics show that UK citizens remain poorly informed about the EU and this has a direct influence on political interest and engagement. However, school students show real delight in finding out about other EU countries and in making contacts with their contemporaries. This enthusiasm is often caught by parents and by the wider community who generally support Europe related activities in their local school and are keen that young people become better informed about Europe and the EU. Schools can offer impartial information and also help to counter prejudice about other Europeans through school linking programmes within the European Union.

3 February 2006
General Initiatives Affecting National Parliaments

Question 1: What role do the Commission’s “Plan D” for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate’ and other initiatives of the European Institutions envisage for national parliaments as regards improving the presentation and explanation of European Union issues to the citizen? How far would it be appropriate for the national parliaments to play such a role?

(a) The European institutions have stressed the importance and the need of co-operation with national parliaments of the Member States on several occasions. During the “Period of Reflection” that has been called by the Heads of State and Government in 2005, there are two main initiatives: the Commission’s “Plan D” and the European Parliament’s “Resolution on the period of reflection: the structure, subjects and context for an assessment of the debate on the European Union” (2005/2146(INI), Duff/Voggenhuber report, see annex) which was adopted by an overwhelming majority on 19 January.

(b) The Commission’s “Plan D” stresses the role of national parliaments as “the bridge to ensure effective scrutiny of decisions taken by National Governments on European issues”. The Commission is therefore determined to deepen its co-operation with national parliaments beyond the current level.

(c) The Duff/Voggenhuber report constitutes the main contribution of the European Parliament to launching and stimulating the debate about the future of the constitutional process. In this report, the EP proposes close co-operation with national parliaments in fostering the European dialogue. The European Parliament is going to organise together with national parliaments a first conference (Parliamentary Forum) on 9 May 2006 in Brussels. This conference will bring together the parliaments with the European institutions in a debate about the key questions on the future of Europe, such as:

— What is the goal of European integration?
— What role should Europe have in the world?
— In the light of globalisation, what is the future of the European social and economic model?
— How do we define the boundaries of the European Union?
— How do we enhance freedom, security and justice?
— How do we finance the Union?

In order to prepare these discussions, the European Parliament is committed to draft “European Papers”.

(d) The national parliaments have to be key actors in bringing the European questions to the citizens. Without their contribution it will not be possible to create a European-wide political process. The European institutions are therefore very keen to work together with the national parliaments towards the creation of a European democratic space.

Question 2: On a more general level, is there really a lack of information about the EU as opposed to a lack of political engagement in EU matters?

(a) Unfortunately, there seems to be both a stunning lack of knowledge and huge misunderstandings about the EU, and a lack of European engagement among many political actors at the national level. This problem is made worse by a lack of understanding of the EU structures in the media and unbalanced reporting on EU matters. On the other hand, a high level of good quality information amongst European citizens is essential for developing the European democracy and encouraging political engagement in EU matters.

(b) The European institutions and the European Parliament in particular are trying to meet this challenge by addressing European citizens more directly and involving representatives of civil society more intensely in the formulation of European policies. The European Parliament therefore supports the proposals by Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström to improve training for journalists on EU matters and generally to find new ways to communicate European integration. This can only work, however, if the national political level (governments, parliaments, political parties, civil society) takes its share of the responsibility and works closely with the European institutions.
Question 3: Is the idea of a new simultaneous debate on the Commission’s AWP across all Member States (a) desirable and (b) practical?

(a) The Commission’s AWP, covering issues of great importance to all European citizens, is a highly suitable focus for launching a European debate. It is clearly necessary to encourage vivid and intensive national debates about European matters, and what European integration means in each country. At the same time, it is also necessary to connect public opinion in the member states to a developing European public and to discuss the European aspects of national concerns. Therefore debates about the AWP and visits of European Commissioners to national parliaments would be good tools to liven up this process.

(b) Regarding the feasibility of such debates, there is no reason why they should not be possible. As long as the political will exists, it is a question of involving national and transnational actors of civil society and the different parliaments to have these debates. Of course the European dimension of such a debate should be ensured for example by publishing articles about the debates in other Member States and the participation of political actors from other member states and the European institutions.

Memorandum from Mr Declan McHugh, Director, Parliament and Government Programme, Hansard Society

I write on behalf of the Hansard Society in response to the House of Lords EU Select Committee’s request for evidence in respect of its inquiry into whether the Lords could or should play a more active role in communicating EU matters to UK citizens.

The Hansard Society is currently in the latter stages of producing a paper on the scrutiny of European business, the eighth in its series of Issues in Law Making briefing papers which has predominantly looked at the domestic legislative process. Although, as the title suggests, this paper focuses primarily on the question of scrutiny of EU business, it does contain some information that is pertinent to the subject of your inquiry. Unfortunately, our paper will not be completed until the end of this month at the earliest (and so misses your 6 February deadline); nonetheless, we will forward a copy as soon as it is available.

In the meantime, the Committee may be interested in looking at some of the data in the enclosed Hansard Society/Electoral Commission Audit of Political Engagement (not published) relating to public knowledge of the political process—including the EU. The relevant pages are 19–22. The information in the Audit is based on a Political Engagement Poll designed by the Society and the Commission, and undertaken on our behalf by MORI Social Research Institute.

As you will see, the findings suggest that the public is seriously uninformed about even the most basic facts relating to the EU. I hope the committee finds the enclosed report useful in providing some contextual data for its inquiry. I will forward the other material I mentioned in due course.

6 February 2006

Memorandum from Sandy Mewies AM, Chair to the European and External Affairs Committee, National Assembly for Wales

The Committee supports open, public discussions on the implications of EU policy and legislation for the UK and Wales, in order to help the public make sense of Europe, our role in it and how it affects people’s lives, work and businesses. We welcome the House of Lords inquiry into whether or not the House could play a greater role in ensuring that matters relating to the EU are clearly and objectively explained to the citizen.

Scrutiny of EU issues within national parliaments and in regional parliaments and assemblies brings greater transparency to the EU decision-making process. Moreover, a debate conducted in familiar terms and set within the regional or even local context makes it easier for the citizen to understand and relate to EU issues.

That said, it is clear also that debates at the national level play an important role as well in raising the profile and improving the opportunities for debate of EU issues. The Committee would welcome any steps taken by the House of Lords to facilitate this.
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We had views on some of the specific questions in your “Call for Evidence”, which are summarised below:

On a more general level, is there really a lack of information about the EU as opposed to a lack of political engagement in EU matters?

— The two elements are closely interconnected. There is a lack of information in the public domain on how the EU operates and any information is tempered by a generally Euro-sceptic British press. This in turn has an effect on the lack of political engagement. However, in the 2004 European Elections, turnout in Wales was at 41 per cent, compared to 38 per cent of the UK as a whole, perhaps reflecting the positive impact on Wales of the European “Objective 1” (Convergence) funding it receives. Therefore, more obvious signs and clear explanations of positive local action by European Institutions would be likely to improve both political engagement and public understanding of what the EU does.

What steps is the Government taking to explain the EU more effectively to the public and what degree of success are such measures encountering? How far should the House of Lords seek to add value to this work?

— Given that there is a real lack of information amongst the British public about the workings of the EU in general, as well as a lack of information about how they benefit from EU initiatives, any effort by the House of Lords to add to this would be welcomed. Perhaps asking communications experts for advice on how to better explain the work of the EU to the public would assist in this. In addition, making the House of Lords European Union Select Committee website more accessible would be of use. For example, more visual elements and clear explanations of European jargon. The complicated language surrounding European legislation (and the House of Lords’ scrutiny of it) is divorced from the reality of the people whose lives it affects.

Is the idea of a near-simultaneous debate on the Commission’s AWP across all member states (a) desirable and (b) practical?

— A new approach to scrutinising EU legislation and policy proposals within the Assembly’s Committees was adopted for this year, on the basis of the European External Affairs Committee’s recommendation at a meeting on 11 November 2004. Following positive feedback from the Committees, it is proposed that this new approach should be continued, whereby a limited number of high priority issues are selected by the Assembly’s Committees on the basis of the EU work programme for scrutiny over the coming year. In the National Assembly, then, a committee-based debate on the European Commission’s forward work programme is deemed to be appropriate.

The Committee would welcome making Explanatory Memorandums available to the public through the internet; either by the House of Lords or by the UK Government. This would be a useful first step towards making the EU decision-making process more transparent, the potential implications of EU proposals from the UK Government’s perspective. The Committee recently recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should attach Explanatory Memorandums systematically to each report on EU policy or draft legislation which it submits to the Assembly’s Committees.

I look forward to reading the report of your inquiry.

3 February 2006

Memorandum from Mr Kenneth Munro, Chairman, European Movement

Please find below our comments on the House of Lords Call for Evidence regarding European Union matters.

1. General Initiatives Affecting National Parliaments

(a) Enhanced involvement of National Parliaments in EU business would seem to be both desirable and necessary as part of any plan for democracy, dialogue and debate. It should be noted here that National Parliaments may also include devolved administrations such as the Scottish Parliament.

(b) There is no lack of information about the EU. The problem is one of dissemination, particularly in the UK where in general the press takes an anti-EU stance and such information as it provides is almost always biased and incorrect.
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(c) The idea of a near simultaneous debate on the Commission’s Annual Work Programme is both desirable and should not be impracticable. A regular annual debate in the UK parliament on or near Europe Day (9 May), if properly reported, would be an excellent way to draw the attention of the British public to the legislative programme of the European Union. The fact that the Council of Ministers of the Member States is one of the principal legislative bodies in the EU, and that the Commission’s programme derives from decisions taken by that body, of which the UK and other Member States’ governments are an intrinsic part, would become much more evident.

2. Initiatives in the UK

(a) The Government is taking no apparent steps at all to explain the EU more effectively to the public. The House of Lords European Union Committee produces outstanding reports on EU legislation but these tend to be unknown to the public at large. The Committee is in an excellent position to comment on EU legislation on an independent, factual, non-party basis.

(b) The more transparency the better.

(c) All parts of government should have a role in explaining EU matters and their attitude to them. It would be for the House of Lords itself to decide how it might appropriately do so.

(d) The EU Select Committee and Sub-Committees. The consultative paper already points the way ahead. The best means of communicating with the public is electronically. A straightforward, jargon-free, easily navigable website is how the Committee’s work can be followed by “the public” and, at the same time, is the means by which “the public” can best make its views known to the Committee. Of course, there is always the danger that self-selecting interest groups can use an interactive website in such a way as to distort the importance of their particular point of view. However, that danger is outweighed by the benefits of allowing varying opinions to be heard. Please keep it simple!

(e) It would be very helpful if the European Union Select Committee could hold its hearings in public and in the various UK nations and regions, not just in Westminster.

3. Danish, Swedish and Irish Examples

As stated previously, a simple, objective one-stop information shop would be an extremely valuable resource. While European Institutions such as the Commission and the Parliament provide good information services via such bodies as Europe Direct and Info-points, they nevertheless might be viewed as having a particular line to peddle and therefore lacking impartiality. That is something avoided by the Danish, Irish and Swedish examples. One such Information Body should adequately serve all layers of government. There does not seem to be any particular reason why the House of Lords should have a centre separate from that of the House of Commons. An independent UK Forum for Europe along Irish lines would not present any special “cultural” problem (British culture is remarkably adaptable) and might serve as a useful feed into EU matters but its practicality might not be so evident at a time when there is little of a controversial nature (constitution, euro) emanating from the EU. Equally such an independent forum could usefully discuss publicly current proposed EU legislation such as the REACH programme and the proposal to set common EU standards for testing the suitability of medicines prescribed for children.

2 February 2006

Memorandum from Professor The Lord Norton of Louth, Professor of Government, University of Hull

1. The Committee’s Call for Evidence identifies in essence two possible roles for the House in relation to the European Union. One constitutes a role that, in my view, the House most certainly should not undertake. It is undesirable on constitutional and political grounds. The other is a role that I believe the House can, and should, fulfil, essentially enhancing what it presently does. The principal mechanism through which this latter role is, and should be, carried out is the European Union Committee.
EU LEGISLATION—PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE SCRUTINY ROLE OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS

24 April 2006

EXPLAINING THE EU

2. The first role is that of the House complementing the role of Government in “presenting and explaining EU matters to the citizen”, possibly through the EU committee or some impartial unit attached to the House. The relationship embodied in this particular model can be represented as follows:

\[
\text{Public} \rightarrow \text{House of Lords} \rightarrow \text{European Union}
\]

3. The relationship in this model is basically a principal-agent relationship. This is objectionable on constitutional grounds. The role of Parliament is to examine the work of the Union on behalf of the citizen and to seek to influence government prior to meetings of the Council of Ministers (or the European Council) and to contribute to debate within the European Union. It is essential therefore that national parliaments retain their autonomy for the purposes of scrutinising what is being proposed. That position would be compromised if national parliaments were seen to be adopting an agency role.

4. Such a role would also appear politically objectionable. The material disseminated may be objective and impartial, but the selection as to what is disseminated is a matter of judgement—and the exercise of that judgement opens one up to accusations of subjectivity. The EU has the means in place for disseminating material about its work and there is no obvious reason why that work should be duplicated by national parliaments. There would also be a serious practical objection if it were a task allocated to the EU Committee: the opportunity cost would be substantial.

5. Finally, it is not clear that the European Commission itself is advocating such a role. Though the Commission’s Plan D clearly envisages ensuring that people are better informed, contending that one of the main objectives of the period of reflection “should be to stimulate a more accurate communication of the activities of the European Union”, the emphasis in the Communication is on national parliaments engaging in scrutiny and contributing to debate about the future of the EU. The Communication would thus appear more compatible with the other role envisaged for the House.

DEBATING THE ROLE OF THE EU

6. The second role is that of the House engaging in two-way communication, not only with the institutions of the EU (variously via the Government) but also with the public. This relationship can be represented in simple form thus:

\[
\text{Public} \leftrightarrow \text{House of Lords} \leftrightarrow \text{European Union}
\]

7. The second leg of the relationship is already in place, in that the House—through the EU Committee and its seven sub-committees—already engages in scrutiny of EU documents and contributes to debate within the EU. Where value may be added is in enhancing the inter-action between members of the public and the House. In this process, the House retains its role as a detached and informed chamber, able to exercise its judgement in scrutinising Commission proposals and in informing debate.

8. The greater interaction with members of the public is desirable and worth pursuing. It is important at two levels. One is in ensuring that people are better informed about the work of the House in its scrutiny of the EU. This meshes well with the recognition that the House should be further enhancing its communication role. The Hansard Society Commission chaired by Lord Puttnam has argued the case for a more coherent communication strategy for Parliament. When the Commission’s report was debated in the Lords on 3 November, the need for the House to ensure that people were more aware of its activities was emphasised by a number of speakers. The second level is in ensuring that people are more aware of what is happening in the EU and are able to contribute to debate about what is happening. This is where the House has a pivotal role to play, primarily through the EU Committee.

9. The two levels come together in terms of a single strategy. It is essential that the House, and the EU Committee, devote more resources to ensuring that the work of the EU Committee is more widely disseminated. Committees of both Houses already produce authoritative reports and, through their inquiries and reports, have a relationship with those bodies operating in the policy sectors they cover. Interested groups are the principal consumers of committee reports. The challenge for Parliament is to ensure that the impact of committees extends beyond the “usual suspects”. This should encompass both the input and the output stages.


10. At the input stage, there is a need to ensure that a greater range of people are aware of what the House—in this case, principally the EU Committee—is doing. This is quite a challenge. This is illustrated by the fact that very few members of the House are aware of what each EU sub-committee is doing. There is material available but the dissemination strategy is essentially reactive rather than proactive: that is, the information is there for people who wish to find it. Even then, the form in which it is available is not necessarily user-friendly. The Parliament website is formed on the basis of the institutional structure of Parliament. Individuals who are not knowledgeable about Parliament but interested in a particular policy sector may have difficulty locating any inquiry of interest to them. It is essential that the re-designed website takes into account policy areas.

11. One feature that could be introduced, and which is relevant to the input and output side of committee work, is the introduction on the website of an interactive capacity. At the moment, users of the Internet can track down, after some effort, what work is being done by committees but they have no immediate opportunity to respond. By clicking on the appropriate link, they can find out who to e-mail or write to, but this takes time and does not send out a clear message as to the welcome afforded comments by the Committee. Even a simple click-button interactive facility allowing users to let the Committee know they would welcome copies of executive summaries or reports would be a step forward.

12. In seeking to engage more with the public, the Committee may also wish to consider the recommendations of the Constitution Committee in its report on *Parliament and the Legislative Process,* three of which are especially pertinent for this purpose:

— We recommend that both Houses give priority to ensuring that material about each House put in the public domain explains in clear and accessible manner what both Houses are doing and what consultation exercises are being undertaken in which comments from the public are invited. [para. 208]

— We recommend the greater use of e-consultation, but such consultation should be moderated and seen as only one of the tools available to parliamentary committees to consult the public and interested groups. [para. 213]

— We recommend that committees consider commissioning public opinion polls where they believe it useful to have an awareness of public opinion on the bill in question. [para. 217].

Another pertinent recommendation is for committees (or, in this case, sub-committees) to spend more time taking evidence away from Westminster.

13. These recommendations are not meant to be exhaustive but to illustrate ways in which Committees can exploit new ways of engaging with the public and eliciting the views of the public. Ensuring that the Explanatory Memoranda on EU documents are made publicly available on the Internet will also contribute to this process. Clearly, the speed with which some matters are considered restricts the time available for consultation, but for most sub-committee inquiries there is time to invite responses, however speedily, from the public. In many cases, the response may be low or non-existent but the fact that people have been invited to contribute—and are aware they have been invited to do so—is important in terms of enhancing awareness of the process and the work of the House.

14. Inviting contributions from the public should not be seen to trespass on the work of the House of Commons. Committees of the House already invite contributions from the public and the committee work of the House complements that of the Commons rather than conflicts with it. This is notably so in the case of EU scrutiny, where the emphasis in the Commons is on breadth and that of the Lords on depth. The two Houses may thus serve to reinforce the work of the other through encouraging greater dialogue with the public.

15. On the output side, the House needs to be more proactive in disseminating Committee reports. They are available on the website and for purchase from The Stationery Office. There needs to be a more active dissemination programme, including the wider circulation of executive summaries, free of charge, to interested parties. There may be a case for drawing up a mailing list for the circulation of summaries, and possibly copies of reports, to public, school and university libraries free of charge. Material on committee work should be fed in to citizenship teaching, now part of the curriculum. There may be a case for thinking about what more can be done post-publication. Committees generally appear to think that their work is done once a report is

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24 April 2006

Moving Forward

16. The EU Committee is in a position to contribute to the proposed national debate and to provide an input into the proposed Europe Day on the future of the European Union. However, the schedule suggested by the Commission strikes me as unrealistic if there is to be a widespread and informed debate. A more realistic date for holding the Europe Day would be April 2007 rather than April 2006. Trying to rush the exercise runs the risk of generating a partial debate as well as sending out signals that public opinion is not that crucial to the exercise. Given that there appears to be a popular perception of an elite-driven EU agenda, there is a case for taking time to engender a proper debate.

17. Ensuring that more time is provided is also essential if the other part of the dialogue that I believe to be essential is to be achieved. I have identified the two models inherent in the Committee’s Call for Evidence. However, based on previous evidence I have given to the European Scrutiny Committee in the Commons8 and the European Commission’s stress on the role of national parliaments, I believe that the second model identified above should be developed further. The existing model factors in the role of Parliament, but Parliament itself will be strengthened if other parliaments form part of the model. I would thus advance the following model for consideration:

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Public ↔ Parliament ↔ European Union
    ↓
Other national parliaments
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18. There is a strong case for developing links with other national parliaments. There is not only the political will to achieve this, at least among several parliaments, but also the institutional framework in the form of COSAC and the technology now for regular contact. This is increasingly being exploited. The House of Lords, through the EU Committee, should continue to develop its links with other parliaments as well as developing a dialogue with the public. The Parliament-EU relationship is already well developed—the House being recognised for the quality of its scrutiny—but will be enhanced by being able to draw on input from, and dialogue with, the public and other national parliaments.

1 February 2006

Memorandum from Mrs Anne Palmer

General Initiatives affecting National Parliaments

1.(a) It becomes obvious that the House is following the instructions of the Commission Document (COM 2005 494 final) dated 13.10.2005. It saddens me that those that sit in such a grand old House of Lords have to follow suggestions by an “outside” body. Even the words, a “Period of Reflection” as spoken by our own Prime Minister are from that same document. The document writes of a “listening exercise” yet it has not listened to the people of France and the Netherlands. In the EU “Duff and Johannes Voggenhuber Report, (adopted by the EU Parliament), they warn “that a strategy based on the selective implementation of the Constitution risks destroying the consensus that achieved a balance between the institutions and among Member States, thereby aggravating the crisis of confidence”. That warning has been ignored.

2. As regards “improving and explanation of European Union issues to the citizen”? How can anyone explain to the people of this once sovereign independent country that there is a great need, a desire by the Union to integrate or meld each separate country into one, so much so, that no one country can work efficiently one without the other. That it is deemed necessary for each country to be dependent on each other. In the doing there can only be one governing body and that body will not be housed in the Houses of Parliament. How can any British person explain that?

3. Examples of what is happening and whose plan Members are following. Re the present CAP. British Farmers are not now being paid to grow food. We would therefore allow fields to lie fallow or grow bio-mass, result; we import most of our food. Over the years, there would be no one to teach a new younger generation the

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farming skills and knowledge our forefathers have gained over many generations. The knock-on effect will result in many more skills being lost. Vets, Abattoirs, etc, years and years of experience in many areas completely lost. Dependent on always importing “not so fresh” food and held to ransom on prices.

4. This happened in the mining industry. There is enough Coal beneath British ground to provide heat and therefore gas for many years to come which could be extracted and used in “today’s” world without damage to the environment. The old miners that taught youngsters their skills, engineering, mechanics etc have died out and their experience and skills with them. A whole industry lost and one now, which I doubt many youths of today would want to do anymore. Should I mention shipbuilding and other like areas, aerospace, design, car-making etc we had such expertise in?

5. (Part b “how far would it be appropriate for national parliaments to play such a role?”) The question is, would the politicians listen to the people? Would the people listen to the politicians? Lack of information? We listened to three leaders during the General Election campaign that appeared afraid to even mention the EU, yet the EU intrudes on almost everything in our daily lives. When members of the Government have spoken in the past about the Union it is to compare the EU’s “Charter of Fundamental Rights” to the Beano, and the proposed “Treaty Establishing a Constitution For Europe” as a “tidying up exercise”. Are those words meant to play down the significance of the EU, to deliberately fool the people, or because they themselves feel that the EU is of no consequence?

6. There is a proposal to incorporate the Charter that had the whole of section 2 to itself in the EU Constitution, into our Legislation and give it the same status as the European Convention on Human Rights. There is no true legal base for this. Its last resting place was “annexed” to the Treaty of Nice. To make it legally enforceable it needs a Treaty. Such a constitutional change should be put to the people in a referendum. To the best of my knowledge this great change has not been debated in our Parliament and most importantly, it has been rejected by the people of two Countries in the referendum on the EU Constitution. If anything should be given the same status as the European Convention on Human Rights it should be Magna Carta and our Bill of Rights.

7. Is the idea of a near simultaneous debate on the Commission’s AWP across all Member States desirable? I do not think so, for it matters not what other Countries want to do, it is what our government wants to do that is important to all of us here and for future generations (can we commit future generations to this? Have we that right?) Too late for both, for the results of Dunfermline should tell you that the people are beginning to get rather “cross” to put it mildly. In case our Parliamentarians have not noticed, (a) Our Country is in a mess. (b) People are paying far too many taxes, (c) there are far too many laws, silly petty laws most of which are coming from the EU and (d) yes, they have noticed that their freedoms have been eroded. (d) They do not like it. (e) They like even less, more of their money being GIVEN to the Union.

8. Initiatives in the UK. (a) What steps is the Government taking? In my opinion, none. It is now too late for steps should have been taken in 1972–73 and particularly in 1975 when the referendum was held to ask if we wanted to remain IN the Common Market. (European Community). We would all have been happy to have simply a Common Market, for trade. MP’s, Lords and Ladies knew that it was to become one State. This is recorded in Hansard for the many years it was debated from the late 1950’s until we joined the Community. Some of the great names of yester-year are recorded both “for” and “against” joining for THEY KNEW that the Community was to become one State. This is clear from 12 February 1959 when the Prime Minister of the day said, “but we must recognise that for us to sign the Treaty of Rome would be to accept as the ultimate goal, political federation in Europe, including ourselves”. From Hansard 3 August 1961 Col 1734 Mr (Manny) Shinwell, at the end of a sentence of what the Union was to become said, “and, finally, a European Government.” Mr Stanley Orme (Hansard 16 November 1966) “attended a private meeting at which M Spaak, who was prominent in setting up his concept of what the European Community should be and what it should entail and his explanation sent shivers down the spines of some of my hon Friends who are very pro-European”.

9. How far should the House of Lords seek to add value to this work? The present House of Lords is doing a good job, although when I read the juggling about with changing words from “perhaps” to a “maybe”, or a “might” to a “may” I do despair at times, though understand the necessity. Add Value? I have grave doubts as to whether our Government actually knows the meaning of the word. (One’s principles or standards, one’s judgements of what is valuable or important in life) True value would only come if our politicians had remembered that we have a great Constitution (superior to all others for it was copied by other nations,) there would have been no need for “consultation papers” like this. Interests of transparency? This is allegedly required by the European Union, the Government must then follow that instruction.
10. **What role could the House of Lords play?** As a whole, I don’t think so. Programmes such as Question Time are informative. Participation as individuals, maybe? The great disadvantage, and people have picked up on this, there is a tendency for the BBC to be (seen) as biased. People used to rely on the BBC’s impartiality especially in the 1940’s sadly, as everything else, it is now subject to Government bias and to politically correctness. B) Would it be appropriate for the House to undertake this work? The House as a whole? No, but as individuals, maybe.

11. **Much of the House of Lord’s current work in EU matters etc and how far should we be seeking a more general connection with the public?** Committee’s already take “evidence” from certain members of the public but, as I see it, after all the interviews, only a delaying technique can be used. EU legislation has to go through, no matter what.

12. **Trespassing on the work of the elected representatives in the House of Commons?** There is indeed a danger in this, although because of the way the HoL conducts itself and not in the Yahboo conduct of the House of Commons, they would be listened to. Should the HoL become fully elected there will be far greater conflict between the two houses. Where there might be an occasion now for the “other House” to say they are the “elected” House, this would not apply should the House of Lords also become wholly elected.

13. **However, should the Hereditary Peers be removed from the Upper House as is the intention, that could be a repudiation of the 1706–07 Treaty of Union between England (Wales) and Scotland?** “16 Scots Peers shall serve in the House of Lords”. As there were only Hereditary Peers at that time, those 16 Scots Hereditary Peers should stay to preserve the Treaty. Unless of course there is a strong need/desire to break up the United Kingdom and to give Scotland its freedom back and to underline that it is a Region of the EU?

14. **Time Scale.** That bothers me because I believe the HoL does a far better job than the present House of Commons and I would not like the HoL to have less time because of any unnecessary extra undertakings they might take on. I see a great danger for what little democracy (if any) we have left.

15. **The Danish/Swedish EU Information Centres.** There was an EU information centre here in the Wolverhampton University for which they had to allow access to any person from “outside” that wished to use it. The University benefited financially from the EU for this. I was told that I was the only non-university member that visited it. I knew that to be true, because I knew if anyone other than myself had touched any of the books on the shelves! A total waste of money.

16. **How is political impartiality guaranteed in these centres?** They cannot be “impartial”, because these people will be paid, and it will pay them to keep their jobs. They will only keep their jobs if they promote the EU.

17. **The Irish National Forum for Europe.** On its website is the following:—“What seems certain now is that we will not have a referendum in Ireland on the European Constitution before mid-2007”. The **EU constitution is dead. The people of two important Countries have rejected it.** Quite apart from that the United Kingdom cannot, according to our Constitution, integrate any further into the European Union, whether it is by Treaty or by an EU Constitution, to do so would be treasonous. (According to R v Thistlewood 1820, “to destroy the constitution would be treason”). This is quite apart from the fact that our oaths of allegiance are to our own Country and the Crown. Engraved in our hearts and minds forever is the knowledge that “the essence of the offence of treason lies in the violation of the allegiance owed to the Sovereign”. Although I am aware of the various Reports and papers for a more Active European Citizenship the vast majority of British people will never have any kind of allegiance to the European Union.

18. We are fast losing our closest allies, The United States of America through our involvement in European Defence project and particularly in the European Defence Agency which would have to have knowledge of what each Nation State holds in defence capacity and all details therein. This will not sit well when the USA realises that information may be shared with China, Russia etc by the EU as a whole. As I understand it, we have already lost one big contract because of this very situation. The greatest danger in all of this is that our Country will be left vulnerable. Reminiscent of our situation just before the last war. The position now I regard, along with many other people in high office in our services, as reckless and irresponsible.

19. It is proposed that we sell off Crown land in the hopes of raising £30 billion of assets by 2010. What for? To fill the “black hole”? To give to the Union? To allow for the flying of the European Union flag in place of the Union Jack?

20. The Government’s Consultation Paper is totally out of place for the question should not be about bringing the Union closer to the people, for we are our own people, never in hundreds of years have we been ruled or governed by other than our own. Many have died and may do so in the future to prevent that happening. It is to yourselves that you should be putting the question whether you should be true to your Queen (Crown) and Country before all else, **or your Political party?**
21. There then becomes a second choice. To choose between our Country and the European Union. Do we remain in the European Union **forever (No Parliament shall Bind)** or do we become what was asked of the people in 1975?

22. I have tried to give simple and honest replies. They may not be the replies you wished to hear, but it is my sworn duty and one in which I have never wavered for my duty and my loyalty is to our Queen Elizabeth (Crown) and our Country.

23. Our involvement in the European Community, right from the very start as far as this Country was concerned, was built on lies, deceit and deliberately misleading information. It probably was treasonable right from the start for it was contrary to The Queen’s Coronation Oath. Do we simply stand and watch while our Country dies under the EU’s Liberalisation and Competition Policies, Directives and Regulations? **That is the question that should be asked.**

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**Correspondence between Lord Pearson of Rannoch and the Chairman, Letter from Lord Pearson**

Thank you for extending the deadline for evidence submissions until tomorrow.

Your Committee will not be surprised to hear that I am against this proposal, for two reasons.

1. The Committee was set up by the House “to consider EU documents and other matters relating to the EU”. I would have thought that the proposed change in its terms of reference would require to be agreed by the House, after appropriate debate.

2. I fear your Committee would be unlikely to “present and explain” the EU in an unbiased way, given its strongly Europhile composition. I have not carried out an in-depth analysis of its membership, but at a glance one can see that of its 18 members, 12 are amongst the most ardent Europhiles in the House (including the Chairman), only 3 could be described as Eurosceptic, and none publicly espouses the view that the UK should leave the EU, a view held by a large and growing proportion of the British population. I am unsure of the views of the remaining 3 members, but none are known Eurosceptics. Similar or worse imbalance afflicts all your sub-committees.

I used to raise this problem regularly when the Committee’s reappointment came to the House for ratification, but gave up in despair some years ago.

I trust this is helpful, and would of course be delighted to justify what I have said in evidence!

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**Letter from Lord Pearson to the Chairman**

I am sorry to be even more of a nuisance, following my letter to Simon Burton of 27 February, but I note from the *Weekly Bulletin* of 3 March that your Committee’s contemplated exercise was changed on 14 February from “A role for the House of Lords in presenting and explaining the EU” to “Public awareness and the role of the House of Lords in the EU legislative process”, which would appear to be somewhat different?

Yet I note that the (revised) deadline for evidence remained 28 February, and had therefore expired before the Bulletin was issued. I appreciate that your Committee remains keen to make “a contribution to the fostering of a more informed public understanding of the work of the EU” (despite the views you received from me and I gather other Noble Lords), but surely we should have another period in which to submit evidence on the new proposal? Or is it going to be the same old wolf, just dressed up in sheep’s clothing? And surely the new proposal still falls outside your terms of reference?

Forgive me, but I don’t understand what is going on, and I am not alone!

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**Letter from the Chairman to Lord Pearson**

Thank you very much for your letter of 6 March concerning the Select Committee’s current inquiry into “Public awareness and the role of the House of Lords in the EU legislative process”.

The Committee had originally set a deadline of 6 February for written evidence submissions for this inquiry. In the *Weekly Bulletin* dated 10 February this deadline was extended until 28 February as the inquiry had, erroneously, been left out of the *Weekly Bulletin* listings until the issue of Friday 3 February.
At its meeting on Tuesday 14 February the Committee deliberated on the written evidence it had received to date and, as a result, decided to focus the inquiry on “Public Awareness and the role of the House of Lords in the EU legislative process”. The Committee’s revised focus for the inquiry was printed in the Weekly Bulletin dated 17 February as follows, “the Committee . . . decided, as a contribution to the fostering of a more informed public understanding of the work of the EU, to focus its inquiry on the identification of practical steps that could be taken to broaden and improve public understanding of the work of the House of Lords in scrutinising EU legislation”. The deadline for written evidence remained 28 February, allowing just under two weeks for further written submissions, and witnesses were called to give oral evidence on the basis of this revised focus. This information was repeated in the Weekly Bulletin dated 3 March, to which you refer in your letter.

Although the deadline for written evidence has now officially expired I would be delighted to receive your views on the inquiry, in the form of an official written submission or otherwise, and would ensure they were drawn to the attention of the Committee.

I hope this letter will clear up any lingering misunderstandings about both the timing of the responses to our call for evidence and the focus of our inquiry.

8 March 2006

Letter from Lord Pearson to the Chairman

Thank you for your letter of 8 March, which we discussed this morning.

It is true that the new terms of reference for your proposed enquiry were printed in the Weekly Bulletin of 17 February, but the House had risen for the half-term break the day before, and so a number of Peers, myself included, did not see it until the House returned on the 27th, one day before your previous deadline expired. I wrote to your Clerk that day.

I am not convinced that your terms of reference allow you “to contribute to the fostering of a more informed public understanding of the work of the EU”, nor to “identify practical steps which could be taken to broaden and improve public understanding of the work of the House of Lords in scrutinising EU legislation”.

I fear your initiative has to be seen against the background of the latest multi-billion-euro push by Brussels, in educational establishments and elsewhere, to get the ‘European citizen’ to appreciate how wonderful the EU really is, and how doltish the French and Dutch voters were to turn down the proposed Constitution. The idea is presumably to get the people not to make too much of a fuss when parts of the Constitution are revived as a “tidying-up exercise”.

As to the work of your Committee and Sub-Committees, can you tell me the occasions when you have succeeded in getting the Commission, Coreper or the Council of Ministers to change their minds on any significant legislative proposals? And, incidentally, of any law passed in Brussels which has been successfully overturned by Parliament (the UK Parliament!).

Could I suggest that if your Committee has spare energy and resources it should conduct another enquiry into fraud and mismanagement in the EU? Ten years ago and more, when its composition was more balanced, it conducted a series of excellent enquiries into this scandal, which of course continues to this day because none of the assurances given by the Government and the EU have been met.

I confirm that I and my colleagues remain happy to give evidence, and I look forward to your reply.

23 March 2006

Letter from Lord Pearson to the Chairman

Could I add a P.S. to my letter of yesterday inspired by your helpful intervention on my starred Q (yesterday)?

This is that it would be helpful if your new initiative could report on how often the scrutiny reserve has been over-ridden by the Government over recent years, say since 1996? When I was on the Committee (1992–96) the Government used the over-ride quite sparingly, and usually with some semblance of good reason. How often have they used it in each year since then, and what were their reasons? I hope this is helpful.

24 March 2006
24 April 2006

Memorandum from Dermot Scott, Director of the European Parliament UK Office
(Memorandum submitted in a personal capacity)

You have posed two main questions:

1. is there a role for the Committee in ensuring that matters relating to the European Union are clearly and objectively explained to the citizen
2. whether such a role would be appropriate.

and you refer to general initiatives affecting national parliaments, to UK initiatives and to initiatives in Denmark, Sweden and Ireland.

The present note is intended to give personal impressions of the role and effectiveness of the Danish, Swedish and Irish initiatives, as seen from the vantage point of an official in an EU Office. It is a personal note and does not commit the European Parliament.

I do not consider that it is for me to advise on the appropriateness or otherwise of such a role for your committee. However, in the event that the EU Committee decided that it could play a role in the dissemination of information, there could be welcome scope for co-operation with the Offices of the European institutions in the UK.

It is apparent that there is room for everyone to contribute to clear and objective explanation of EU matters. It is true, as your Call for Evidence hints, that there is no real shortage of information. The EU institutions are notoriously open and, in the limited areas where they are not formally open, informally often quite transparent.

Some considerations are as follows:

— the extent to which the Committee can act as an educator for the body politic, in particular for Peers and MPs, on matters European.
— secondly, the question of how it can optimally engage the media, national and regional, written and broadcast, specialist and general.
— thirdly, engagement of the interest of civil society, in particular of the relatively powerful single-interest groups and NGOs which form such a mobilising force in society.
— fourthly, engaging the general public directly.

Raising the level of understanding of specific EU matters (rather than the In/Out question) in the Palace of Westminster would undoubtedly raise the level of debate and might consequently trickle down into media and public interest. It is apparently rare for EU legislative matters, even those referred by the Commons Committee, to reach the floor of that House. This must partly reflect the low level of knowledge, and possibly the feeling of powerlessness, of MPs faced with dealing with proposals forwarded by the Council. Topical examples are the Services Directive, the Working-time Directive and the Port Services Directive. The House of Lords appears less prone to such factors.

Engagement of national parliamentarians in EU matters may also be a matter of encouraging them to take part in meetings with their opposite numbers in parliaments of other Member States. Such opportunities occur in COSAC, in exchanges of visits and in attendance at committee meetings of the European Parliament.

If EU matters are largely neglected by the political class they will tend to be ignored by the media. Then later, when the domestic implications of a legislative proposal become manifest as the Directive falls to be implemented, they come as a surprise, often unwelcome and misunderstood, and are excoriated in the press.

Engaging the attention of the media is thus a major challenge.

Yet, once made aware of the possible implications of proposals, specialist media and broadcast programmes can be interested in informing their readers and subscribers; regional media can be interested in following the involvement of local politicians and MEPs; and the national press can often be steered away from mistaken or knee-jerk hostility. If a genuine political debate takes place on the merits of the proposal, it may prove attractive; at least it will tend to reduce the level of ignorance.

Engaging civil society is comparatively easy. Many organisations, local authorities, NGOs, business and professional bodies are well-informed and active on EU matters. They will often welcome approaches to inform or engage them on EU matters. A targeted and tailored approach on specific topics, via the political arena, the media and through direct contact with large membership organisations, civil society and NGOs,
offers better possibilities than attempts to make direct contact with large numbers of people on broad-brush issues.

Reaching the general public directly is the most difficult challenge. The large political meeting is a thing of the past. Meetings tend to attract the elite or those with an axe to grind, and leave the ordinary punter unmoved. People get their political information from television, the internet, the press and a host of supplementary sources. As new technology and the digital era of communications rapidly advance, the targeting of sectors and individuals with information of direct relevance to their interests is set to grow and become the norm.

Engaging the general public en masse may thus not merit great effort. We have seen in recent years, for instance with the Iraq War and with fox-hunting that, when an issue is of sufficiently general application and has emotional, economic and moral importance, the constituency for and against is as strong as ever. So much of the work of Parliaments today at whatever level is highly technical and cannot be for the general public but is of immense concern to specific groups and lobbies. Ensuring the consultation process is as open and transparent as possible, that legislators have the technical expertise and resources to help them in the balance of decision-making and drafting are of primary importance in a modern democracy.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the experience of the Danish, Swedish and Irish initiatives is interesting. I have knowledge of the Irish experience only, and have some idea of the role, function and effectiveness of the Nordic initiatives from discussions with my colleagues in those Member States.

**Irish National Forum on Europe**

The Irish National Forum on Europe was established in the wake of the defeat of the Irish referendum on the Nice Treaty, and it followed the model—the New Ireland Forum—established in the mid-1980s, and later the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation that was active from 1994-96.

The purpose of the former was to consider on an all-party basis what possible avenues were open to a solution of the problem in Northern Ireland; while that of the latter was partly to attempt to engage Sinn Fein in the normal political process.

Some 70 per cent of the Irish public claim to have heard of the Forum. Conceivably this high figure results from confusion with earlier Forums. It is questionable whether the present Forum has made a significant impact on public opinion by raising levels of awareness or knowledge among people who are not already interested.

However, for people with a genuine interest in European affairs, attendance at plenary sessions and/or regional meetings is straightforward. At regional meetings it is easy to take the floor/make your point/ask your question. The Forum has recently issued a call for submissions from the public and will hold a submissions day in the next few months when people will be invited to give presentations. This has been done at least once before. So: for interested people, the Forum does provide a good locus for engagement.

**Engaging the Public**

The Forum’s regional meetings were well attended as the presumed date of the Irish referendum on the EU Constitution approached in 2005 but attendance diminished after the No votes in France and the Netherlands. The Forum is holding a series of regional meetings in 2006, making a concerted effort to link up on a local/regional basis with local organisations/NGOs/civil society, such as local branches of Young Farmers, Irish Countrywomen’s Association and Chambers of Commerce. The meetings will still of course be open to all. Whether this will be more successful remains to be seen, but it seems a sensible way to combat the decline in attendance, and if it changes the focus from the citizen to the organisation, that may be only a recognition of reality.

**Speakers and Timetabling—Political Independence**

Formally these matters are a decision of the Chairman and his secretariat, both of whom are entirely independent. Political parties have their say on decisions through the Forum’s Steering Committee on which they are all represented and which meets about monthly. It appears that no member of the Forum has seriously questioned the Chairman’s impartiality and the Government parties, especially Fianna Fail, have had good exposure, while “antis” such as Sinn Fein and the Greens get at least their fair share of time. At the outset the main opposition party, Fine Gael, did not wish to take part, saying that the European Affairs Committee of Oireachtas was a more appropriate forum for debate on EU matters. But they are now fully on board.
24 April 2006

The Forum’s budget is €1.49 million, and they enjoy free premises in Dublin Castle. Media coverage is patchy: the *Irish Times* gives good coverage, the *Irish Independent* less, though local/regional press coverage for regional meetings is better. Television and radio coverage is rare.

**SWeden**

The Swedish and Danish Parliaments have established EU Information Centres; I am aware that your Committee has already heard from the director of the Danish centre.

My colleagues consider these centres to be reliable and credible sources of politically impartial information on EU affairs and, in the Swedish case, on Swedish membership of the European Union.

The Swedish centre operates an enquiry service, and provides web information and printed information; it organises courses and training programmes for journalists, teachers and other “multipliers”, either on its own or in cooperation with others such as the European Parliament Office in Sweden.

The Information Centre’s main target is the general public. According to a survey that was carried out in November 2005, 32 per cent of “clients” belonged to this category. The other main groups of clients include local authorities, businesses, students, and the Riksdag and Government offices. The EP Office frequently refers questions to the Centre and is not aware of negative reaction to its services.

The web site is the main source of information. It includes a section with news, another with facts and another called Sweden in the EU. The website has a service where it is possible to follow the progress of an EU decision with links to relevant documents. It also has a section called You and the EU providing information on travelling and moving in the EU.

The Centre has a toll-free number open daily (9–11 am and 2–4 pm). In a normal year the Information Centre receives around 9000 questions. The year of the EMU-referendum the Centre received some 16000 questions. The EP Office co-operates closely with the Centre and has recently co-arranged three regional journalists’ seminars and four EU for Teachers training courses across the country.

It appears that the Centre has been successful in navigating between the different agendas of the Riksdag’s political parties simply by being professional and knowledgeable about the issues on which it informs the public.

**Denmark**

The Danish EU Centre is regarded by the EU institutions as an extremely valuable and helpful supplement and as a trustworthy and reliable partner.

As an integrated part of the Folketing and of the Committee of European Affairs, they have quick access to relevant information. They have a good overview of the flow of EU documents and of the implementation of EU law into Danish law, which is what most citizens are interested in. The EU Office links to their excellent homepage and refers to them without hesitation; they consult the EP Office when they require assistance on a tricky EP-issue.

The Centre has an excellent track record of political impartiality, independent of Government intervention and politically supervised by the information sub-committee of the Committee of European Affairs.

For this reason they were to be the main actor in the now postponed or cancelled information campaign on the Constitution referendum in Denmark. Moreover, they can act more quickly and flexibly than the EU Offices, as they are not subject to the EU’s stringent Financial Regulations.

My impression therefore is that the experience so far has been entirely positive.

**Conclusion**

It appears that the Irish Forum experience is successful in engaging Irish political parties, interest groups and enthusiasts for the European debate, pro and contra. Its ability to engage the media and the general public is less certain, and may depend on the circumstances of the time, for instance, the proximity of a call to the polling station.

The EU Information Centres in Sweden and Denmark may perform better at direct engagement with the individual citizen and with his or her queries. But again, the citizens’ desire to enquire may itself depend on the imminence of an election or referendum.
Both solutions offer useful lessons and are to be welcomed. Neither offers a complete solution to the problem of engaging and informing the citizen on EU issues. Reaching the individual citizen is extremely difficult, though this is of course true of most messages, political or other. One only has to reflect on the funds spent by major advertisers in promoting their brands to appreciate the difficulty of reaching the citizen and, once obtained, the fickleness of the citizen’s recognition.

It may therefore be more realistic to confine one’s effort to attempting to engage the media and the host of representative organisations and associations, hoping thereby to reach at least the potentially-interested individual.

6 February 2006

Letter from the Rt Hon the Lord Strathclyde, Leader of the Opposition, House of Lords to the Chairman

Thank you for your letter of 15 December. I apologise for the late response. I hope that you will still feel able to give consideration to the attached, disappointing though it may be from your perspective. I could not support this initiative.

The views are my own, but reflect discussion with senior colleagues, including David Howell, as our spokesman on EU matters.

9 February 2006

Memorandum from the Rt Hon the Lord Strathclyde, Leader of the Opposition House of Lords

1. The House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union (“the Committee”) has approached peers to seek their views on two subjects:

   (i) if the House could play any further role in ensuring that matters relating to the European Union are clearly and objectively explained to the citizen;
   
   (ii) if it would be appropriate to the House to do so.

2. It is not easy to unbundle the objectives of the enquiry—the “could” and the “should”. In theory, the House of Lords could undertake such an advocacy role. But for it to do so would raise questions about priorities, both in the work of the Committee and across the House. Any attempt to engage the public directly in this explaining role could risk conflict with members of the House of Commons, particular where an MP did not agree with the explanation of EU activity being disseminated by the Committee.

Some Considerations as to Whether the Committee Could Adopt an Explaining Role

3. To address the “could” question first (though arguably the “should” be the first question) the Committee no doubt might do the job. But it might be conscious of these factors:

   (i) the Committee is the best resourced Committee in the House—this function must require additional resources at the expense of other Committees;
   
   (ii) additional resources provided to the Committee would conflict with hopes of others to see more ad hoc Select Committees, or Select Committees on bills—this is a decision on priorities for the whole House, not just the Committee;
   
   (iii) the Committee’s role is to scrutinise the EU and its legislation—this implies at least some element of arms-length scepticism; an advocacy role would not;
   
   (iv) an explaining role needs employment of staff with different functions, such as public relations—EU Committee PR men maybe employed instead of Clerks, whose role is irreplaceable in nature and value to the whole House;
   
   (v) EU legislation is already so extensive and far-reaching that some have expressed the view the Committee is not at present able fully to scrutinise it—adding a further role, or taking time in liaison activities in “connecting” with the public, risks further diluting its ability to perform that central role;
   
   (vi) the Committee is perceived, no doubt unfairly, by a number of peers to be too pro-EU—an advocacy/explaining role risks adding to this impression.
Appropriateness of Undertaking an Explaining Role

4. As to the “should”, it is not at first sight evident why a national legislature should wish to undertake a role in explaining the work of another nation’s legislature, or of an international body. National policy and interests and the policy and interests of the respective bodies will often conflict. The taxpayer expects Parliament to pursue its primary duty of ensuring good government and upholding our national interests. There must be no risk of a conflict of interest that might arise from an advocacy role.

5. If such a role were to be undertaken, what specific arguments are there for the British Parliament, or any part of it, to act as an “explaining” body for the EU, rather than for the Commonwealth, UN, NATO, the Council of Europe or any other body whose actions impinge on the United Kingdom? Who would direct the nature of the “explanations”? Would these have to be agreed with EU institutions concerned? If so, would privilege of Parliament be set at risk? Would the “explaining” role be funded in any way by EU institutions? If so, would it be appropriate for a sovereign Parliament to receive funding from a body with which it might in theory be in conflict and whose activities it is supposed to scrutinise? I do not believe that it would.

6. The EU, although involved in foreign and security policy matters, relates to only one part of this country’s foreign policy activities and interests. There is a danger that “explaining” of EU foreign policy would be at the expense of examination and analysis of the UK’s wider foreign policy interests, an area where the House might in future wish to expand its activities and which extend far beyond the scope of the EU common foreign policy ambit or, indeed, the scope of the Committee.

7. It is my impression that the House is relatively poorly funded (though the good value it represents is part of the reason for its high reputation). It is equally my impression that the EU and its institutions are not short of resources for propagandist activity. There is no financial or policy reason for the House, or the Committee, taking on a role that can perfectly well be performed and financed by the EU itself.

Explaining the EU Single Currency—How Would it be Done?

8. To take a test case—European single currency. Would the Committee be able to agree a clear and objective explanation for this policy, its benefits and its disadvantages? Would the House endorse the explanation? By what process would an explanation be negotiated, approved and disseminated? How would those involved be accountable to the House, in that those outside the House would see the information disseminated as representative of, and given the seal of authority of, the House of Lords? To pose these questions is to see the potential for division and misunderstanding in a course of explaining EU policy.

Responses to Questions raised by the Committee

9. The Committee posed specific questions. I address some not answered implicitly or directly above, viz.

Is there really a lack of information about the EU as opposed to a lack of political engagement in EU matters?

No.

Is the idea of a near simultaneous debate on the Commission’s AWP across all Member States (a) desirable, (b) practical?

No. The Commission should have no locus whatsoever in determining the programme of business of national parliaments or in influencing them—this would be an extremely undesirable principle. It is also unlikely to be practical as the timetable of the House does not coincide with every other legislature. As a revising chamber we must give priority to scheduling business connected with the delivery of the Queen’s business and as may be proposed by peers.

On recent example would be the case of droit de suite. A policy, inimical to the interests of the UK art market was resisted by the United Kingdom for a period of years. It was imposed by majority vote with the UK voting against. The EU Parliament in the co-decision process then made the policy more onerous to the art market, before it was finally gold-plated by the UK Government in regulation. How would the Committee propose to “explain” this to the UK citizen? And how would the Committee’s role take into account the hostility expressed by many peers in the Chamber to the role of the EU in imposing droit de suite or reflect their views in its explanations?
EU Legislation—Public Awareness of the Scrutiny Role of the House of Lords

24 April 2006

What steps is the Government taking to explain the EU more effectively to the public and what degree of success are such measures encountering? How far should the Lords seek to add value to this work?

This question is more appropriately answered by government. My impression is that its efforts to explain the EU are half-hearted, confused and ineffective. It is inappropriate for a House of Parliament to be a partner with the Executive in any advocacy role. The House of Lords should not act as a partner of any government in seeking to explain the EU.

Would it be practically viable for the House of Lords to set up an EU Information centre?

No. Were resources to allow, the House should give priority to improving support to its peers so they are able to fulfil their role more effectively including that of holding the EU more accountable to national Parliaments.

Should a National Forum for Europe be introduced?

This is a matter for the UK Government, if it wishes to foment or finance such a forum. It is not a role for the House of Lords or any Committee of the House. It is not clear to me what is envisaged by the “inclusive and broadly based” debate such a Forum would enable. I believe that so far as Parliament is concerned the best place for such a debate is in the chambers of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons.

Conclusion

10. I am wholly unpersuaded of the case for an “explaining” role. Although this evidence is personal, I could not, as Leader of the Opposition, recommend colleagues to endorse it.

11. Peers I have consulted feel the Committee should direct any resources it may feel it has to spare to improving and extending sceptical arms-length scrutiny of the EU and EU legislation, which is having a major, but frequently poorly accountable, impact on our lives, rather than seeking new functions. If the Committee feels it has more resources than it needs to carry out its core function, the House could perhaps consider reallocation of resources between the Committee and other Select Committees of the House.

Letter from Ms Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission to the Chairman

I would like to thank you for your letter of 15 December 2005, with a Call for Evidence for the European Union Select Committee’s inquiry on A role for the House of Lords in presenting and explaining the European Union.

As you know from our contacts during the first year of my mandate, I fully support your endeavours to ensuring that matters relating to the European Union are clearly and objectively explained to the citizen, as you put it in your letter.

During this year, I and my colleagues in the College of Commissioners visited the national parliaments no less than 68 times. I do not claim our relations should be seen as a statistical exercise. Nevertheless, I believe this (rather impressive) figure shows this Commission’s commitment vis-à-vis the national parliaments and, not the least, our readiness for dialogue.

Enclosed you will find my replies to your questions on General Initiatives affecting National Parliaments. I hope there will be plenty of opportunities for us to meet and discuss these and other issues also during this year.

30 January 2006

Memorandum from Ms Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission

1. The Communication “The Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” of 13/10/2005 stipulates that national Parliaments have a specific role to play in the organisation and promotion of national debates. The Commission is keen to develop its co-operation with the national Parliaments beyond the targets for the Commission’s relations with the national Parliaments, which it started implementing in early 2005. These targets adopted by the College on 9/02/2005 revolve around three main themes: mutual service; concrete networking; connecting with people and their elected representatives—a greater voice for Parliaments is a greater voice for Europe’s citizens.

Nevertheless, the Commission believes that its role is to assist rather than replace Member States and their Parliaments in the organisation of national debates.
2. There is hardly a lack of information about the European Union. The problem is rather that sometimes this information does not reach each citizen as it is not adapted to her/his needs and methods of perception. Greater use of internet and television as well as communicating in a simple and direct manner is a way of improving this situation.

Moreover, engagement of various political, social, environmental or cultural actors in the process of communicating and debating Europe can play a very positive role in this regard. It is crucial to involve to a greater extent national, regional and local levels in this campaign. The national Parliaments can play a significant role as they emulate the views of citizens: they have information and experience to bring the EU closer to the citizens.

An active interest and participation in the European debate by more national MPs will help to anchor European issues in the national political parties and in national and local political traditions. In this way European issues get a natural place on the national and local political agendas.

It is wrong to say that the national Parliaments are not engaged in the European matters. Apart from their constitutional obligations to scrutinise their Governments, they develop their co-operation in the field of subsidiarity and start regularly debating the future of Europe. The Commission regards these developments as positive and would support further efforts in this area, while respecting the current Treaties and the constitutional situation of each of the Member States.

3. The Commission warmly welcomes the engagement of the national Parliaments in European affairs. The CWLP is a crucial document in the Commission’s annual programming, and debates on this issue in the national Parliaments would help further stimulating their greater responsibility for Europe. Contributions from national Parliaments could help the Commission in directing its works before and after the formal presentation of proposals. However, it is up to national Parliaments to plan their activities and the Commission does not intend to suggest any modalities for such exercises.

Memorandum from Mr Martin Westlake, Head of Communications, European Economic and Social Committee

Thank you for your letter of 15 December 2005. President Anne-Marie Sigmund has asked me to reply on her behalf.

The annexed call for evidence contains many questions, and in most cases it would be inappropriate for the European Economic and Social Committee to reply. However, with regard to the European Commission’s “Plan D” Communication (and, indeed, its White Paper on Communication Policy adopted on 1 February 2006), it is clear that national parliaments are better placed than the European Union’s Brussels- or Luxembourg-based institutions (with the exception of the European Parliament’s members) to communicate salient issues back to the citizen in the Member States, particularly via the national media. Thus, the proposal for an annual debate on the Commission’s work programme, whether simultaneous in all Member States or not, would certainly provide the potential, at least, for greater awareness about the sort of legislation and policy initiatives the European Commission is planning in a given year. Naturally, each new Commission’s initial plan (at the outset of its five-year term) would merit particular attention.

There is a strong argument running through all of the Commission’s most recent documents on communication issues (its 20 July 2005 action plan, the 13 October 2005 Plan D Communication, the 1 February 2006 White Paper) that what the EU’s institutions do can only ever be complementary to what is done at member state level. A strong corollary implication is that more could (or, some would argue, should) be done at member state level, and that national parliaments must be at the forefront of any such further activity.

I am enclosing two recently adopted EESC opinions (not published), one on the “reflection period” and the other on “Plan D” in the hope that these will be of interest to the European Union Committee’s members.

Memorandum from the Baroness Williams of Crosby

I apologise for not having made a written submission. In the weeks immediately prior to your deadline, I was away from London. I have read the other submissions carefully.

1. There is a delicate issue of distinguishing advocacy of the European Union Committee’s role from advocacy of the European Union. I appreciate the distinction, while believing that explanation and advocacy can indeed be separated from one another. I take the point of Lord Norton’s elegant models. I disagree, with respect, with point 4 in Lord Strathclyde’s memorandum. The European Union is neither “another legislature”, nor is it
“an international body”. It is a supranational body, of which we are a member, financed in part by our own citizens’ taxes, and with legal authority in a specific range of areas, in particular the single market. Like it or not, we are part of it. So its transparency and accountability not only matter to our country, Britain herself shares responsibility for ensuring them.

I am not uncritical of the way transparency and accountability have been dealt with. To my mind, it is indefensible that the Council of Ministers still meets in secret even when it is in its legislative mode.

2. In the Committee’s reports, and in those of sub-committees, I see no reason why “explanation” shouldn’t include some description of differences of opinion, albeit it is important to try to reach an agreed conclusion. That is surely the nature of successful negotiation among responsible people.

3. **Information Centres:**

   Given Douglas Alexander’s memorandum (paragraph 11), which says that the Government supports the Commission’s plan to open European Direct information centres across the United Kingdom, there would seem little point in establishing another Information Centre. The European Union Committee of this House might want to make comments on the Europe Direct scheme prior to its being established.

   So what can the European Union Committee usefully do, to promote its work and contribute even more effectively to scrutiny of the EU’s activities?

4. **The Annual Work Programme** provides an excellent opportunity for scrutiny of future proposals, (see Alexander: 6) There is no reason why debate on the work programme, on the floor of the House, should not be synchronised, as far as possible, between Member States (the influence of national Parliaments would be considerably enhanced by this).

   (a) Where a substantial proposal falls within the remit of one of the seven sub-committees, that sub-committee should be invited to examine it in greater detail.

   (b) There should be a period for discussion on the main committee at the beginning and end of each Presidency, and the country holding the Presidency should be invited to send one or more senior representatives to explain their Presidential strategy to the Committee.

   (c) A session of this kind could provide material for much more effective questioning of Ministers when statements are made to Parliament at the end of each European Council. At present these statements are too often lost opportunities for effective oversight by the legislature.

5. Where a policy field moves from the national level to the European level, as asylum and migration are doing inside the Scheme group, or, as is proposed by our own Prime Minister, energy should do, the European Union Committee should regard it as a priority for a new kind of scrutiny, possibly involving drawing on appropriate members from several sub-committees.

6. **Communications**

   (a) Abstracts of Committee reports and executive summaries should be high on the website, able to be downloaded free of charge.

   (b) Consideration should be given to setting up an e-mail network of people with a special interest in the Committee’s work, and to putting the Newsletter on the network.

   (c) As Lord Norton suggests, the Government’s explanatory memoranda on directives etc should certainly be made available on the website...

   (d) The specialised media, eg agriculture, transport, environment, are far more likely to cover sub-committee reports than the national media. Provision should be made for modest specialised press and media launches of sub-committee reports.

7. **Universities and Schools**

   (a) The EU Committee should consider funding two or three case studies on how directives are framed, debated and scrutinised through all stages. There are some telling examples, for instance how tobacco products came to be obliged to carry health warnings. Discussion of such cases is a most effective teaching method.
(b) An exhibition of the work of the Committee should be organised for Westminster Hall, accompanied by a daily seminar for schoolchildren studying the subject for A-levels.

(c) If resources were available, I would propose an annual sixth form conference on European issues linked into the new curriculum subject of citizenship, explaining how the European Union works.

(d) Finally, much of this work could be paralleled through COSAC by other Member States, eg parallel case studies on how European legislation is scrutinised by different Member States.

Written submission from Lord Williamson of Horton, Convenor of the Crossbench Peers

GENERAL INITIATIVES AFFECTING NATIONAL PARLIaments

I do not think there is any simple way in which national parliaments or governments can “connect with the citizen” on European issues. Indeed, I think this connection is a Shangri-La of the Europhiles. On the contrary, I consider that the most useful course for national parliaments and governments is to draw attention to issues where European action is judged to be positive for the nation and the citizen. As a country we have a long-established tradition in the British press of criticism and often misrepresentation in everything that is undertaken within the European Union and any counter-balance is of value.
I do not myself think that there is a lack of information about the European Union. A brief examination of the website or the publications cited by the Universities Association for Contemporary European Studies shows a mountain of books, brochures and pamphlets about the European Union but, of course, these do not reach the citizen in the pub because political engagement is, to say the least, tepid.
I would see no objection if the Select Committee were to examine a number of issues which are not directly linked to legislation and to report on them and to give them widespread publicity. More specifically, I would like to see a debate on the annual legislation and work programme of the European Commission as this is a foretaste of proposals which are likely to come before the British Government for their acceptance or rejection. I do not mind whether the debate is simultaneous with debates in other national parliaments.

INITIATIVES IN THE UK

I am pessimistic about any broad initiative on the part of the Select Committee to “seek a more general connection with the public”. I do consider, however, that a more vigorous presentation of the results of the Committee’s work (including in the future some reports on widespread themes of positive action by the Union) would be advantageous. I cannot see how anyone could complain that this would trespass on the work of the House of Commons.

INFORMATION CENTRES

I am doubtful whether this House could take an initiative to establish an information centre which would not be open to criticism, in view of the history of public reaction to the European Union in this country.
We are in the bizarre situation that, although UK membership of the European Union has been at the centre of our national policy for more than half a lifetime, it is still possible to think that a new information centre might be needed. For myself, I would see no difficulty about this, but I am afraid I do not think that this House would be the best sponsor.

7 February 2006