

**THE FEDERAL TRUST**  
*for education & research*

*Enlightening the Debate on Good Governance*

**The European Parliament  
and the British People:  
2004**

MICHAEL STEED



**European Essay No.30**

## A Definition of Federalism

Federalism is defined as 'a system of government in which central and regional authorities are linked in an interdependent political relationship, in which powers and functions are distributed to achieve a substantial degree of autonomy and integrity in the regional units. In theory, a federal system seeks to maintain a balance such that neither level of government becomes sufficiently dominant to dictate the decision of the other, unlike in a unitary system, in which the central authorities hold primacy to the extent even of redesigning or abolishing regional and local units of government at will.'

(*New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*)

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© The Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004  
ISSN 1468 9049  
ISBN 1 903403 69 3

## Introduction

The European elections in this country tend, like local elections, to be viewed by commentators simply as staging-posts in the progress from one General Election to the next. A good performance by the government will improve its electoral prospects in the only poll that really matters to MPs. A bad performance will correspondingly encourage the opposition parties.

This essay by Michael Steed sets out to consider the European elections as a political and electoral event in their own right. He concludes (surprisingly for some) that the European elections have a character and history all of their own, in which European issues do indeed sway turnout and votes. Politicians who believe that a minimal or non-existent campaign for the European elections will serve their own party's interests may well be deceiving themselves.

But Michael Steed has a message not just for the politicians. He rightly highlights the role of journalists from television and other media in setting a context for electoral debate during the European elections. Since 1999, the Members of the European Parliament elected then have built up a record of political actions and choices. For the electorate to make a rational choice in 2004, it needs the help of journalists and commentators, describing, analysing and criticising that record over the past five years. It is often claimed that the European Parliament is a remote and little-understood institution. Vigorous public controversy over the coming weeks about what MEPs have done in the past five years, and what they want to do in the next five, would do much to make the Parliament less remote and better understood.

**Brendan Donnelly**  
Director of the Federal Trust  
May 2004

### Note on the author:

**Michael Steed** lectured in comparative European politics at the University of Manchester 1965-87, when ill health obliged early retirement. He also stood as a Liberal candidate for Greater Manchester North in the 1979 European Parliamentary elections, and was the British member of the committee chaired by Martin Bangemann which drew up the common European Liberal manifesto for that election. He has written extensively about elections and political parties in several European countries. He is now honorary lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Kent and a Senior Research Fellow of the Federal Trust.

# The European Parliament and the British People: 2004

**Michael Steed**

What will the 2004 European elections in Britain be about? Will they bring more people out to vote than the miserable 23 per cent who voted in June 1999? And what will the outcome mean?

This will be the sixth time the British people have been invited to elect representatives to the European Parliament; yet there is still little agreement about the point of doing so. For many, in political parties and among media pundits, they are essentially a regular test of national party popularity. Insofar as that is what motivates voters, the Euro-elections are therefore more to do with domestic British politics than with European matters. Yet though the outcome of the first two, in 1979 and 1984, fitted that expectation, from 1989 onwards there has been increasing evidence that for quite a number of British people they have been more about Europe. British voters have shown more interest in whatever European dimension they can find than their parties and media recognise.

However, to say that is not to say that they are about issues which are the responsibility of the European Parliament. That remains, for most people, a remote and poorly understood institution. This is not a peculiarly British attitude. Across the European Union, declining turnout, nationally-orientated election campaigns and the absence of a clear political meaning to the overall outcome mark European Parliament elections. In Britain, there may be some additional apathy connected with national feelings towards Europe or, in 1999, the response to a new and poorly explained voting system. However, extensive research on reasons for non-voting show there is a Europe-wide pattern of declining turnout.

Participation in politics has changed with changes in social and cultural attitudes. The generations born, very roughly, after the mid-point of the twentieth century no

longer see voting as a hard-won right or civic duty. They view it more as a transaction with politicians, whom they view as a distinct class with their own sectional interest. This does not necessarily mean apathy about political issues: rather scepticism about voting as a way of influencing these issues. Direct election of the European Parliament had the bad luck to be introduced just as this profound change in political behaviour across Europe was about to weaken the habit of voting.

However, we should not simply discount the low level of turnout. Understanding why it may change, and so measuring it accurately, remains important. We start with these questions. That leads on to what the European Parliamentary elections have been about; and what the 2004 campaign could be about. In Britain, the choice this time as before will be presented mainly as one between national parties: could the elections be more about issues and personalities; and could they have more meaning within the institutional framework of the European Union?

Those who want to encourage people to vote should not be asking how they can persuade people of the point of voting; rather how they can persuade the media and parties to debate choices that make sense to people. These must have some European relevance; otherwise voters will not see the point. The British electorate may not love Europe or understand the part played by the European Parliament. But it has shown in recent Euro-elections that it responds to parties which use the Euro-election campaign to talk about Europe. Will the lesson be heeded?

However, inevitably the result will be examined for its national political impact; the final section of this essay sets out the 1999 result in terms of Britain's reduced number of MEPs, and looks at what may happen this time. A dramatic result is on the cards, though whether that should be taken at face value is debateable. British politicians looking for domestic political meaning may misread the verdict. The more issues relevant to Europe feature in the 2004 campaign, the more feelings on those issues could change the outcome.

### **How many people will vote?**

Almost certainly, more people will vote in 2004 than did so in 1999. So Britain's new 75 MEPs may feel they have a stronger mandate. But beware: there are four reasons why, even if people are no more truly interested in the European Parliamentary elections than they were five years ago, the turnout figure will be higher this time.

In most EU countries turnout at Euro-elections tends to go up or down according to the point reached in that country's domestic political cycle. British turnout in the first Euro-elections in June 1979 was particularly depressed because both party activists



and ordinary voters were ballot-weary just five weeks after the general election in May 1979. It went up a bit, against the general EU trend, in 1989, and stayed up in 1994; both these European elections occurred precisely in the middle of the Westminster term, with keen interest in their significance for the following general election. In 1999, turnout dropped massively, at least in part because the next Westminster election was both some way off and seen as a foregone conclusion. This time, there will be more interest since Tony Blair is expected to bring the next general election (not due until summer 2006) forward a year, making this year's combined European and local elections the last test before he goes to the country. This will bring out more of those voters and party activists (without whose delivery and canvassing fewer people remember to vote) who see Euro-elections mostly as a dry run for the ensuing Westminster election. We should see a modest increase in turnout (say 2-3 per cent) simply to reflect this difference in timing.

Secondly, turnout in the last Euro-elections was particularly depressed because they were held five weeks after the first ever Scottish and Welsh devolved elections, which, with local elections in much of England, had used up political energies. However, in May 1999 London had had no local elections. Consequently the turnout drop in London in the EP elections was markedly less than anywhere else. Extrapolating from London, if there had been no elections in May anywhere in Britain, somewhere between one and two million more people would have gone to the polls in June 1999. Similar ballot weariness having been observed to reduce turnout in other European countries, some had already arranged before 1999 to hold European and domestic elections simultaneously. Typically Britain is catching up this year. The local elections due in May 2004 have been postponed until June.

Some may fear that this will lead to confusion. However, the idea that parties or voters cannot cope with simultaneous elections does not stand up to scrutiny; local and Westminster synchro-elections were held in 1979, 1997 and 2001, and many voters proved that they were capable of understanding the difference, systematically voting for different parties in the two elections. Indeed, there is some evidence that holding two elections simultaneously encourages people to split their tickets. With European and local elections being held on the same day this year, it will be particularly interesting to see how many voters will use their votes to say something like: 'I like party A's European views but party C's local government performance.'

### **The variety of synchro-elections**

In Wales and London there are local elections for all voters. In four other English regions, there are unusually important (because all-out, following a comprehensive

ward boundary review) elections for the metropolitan boroughs: North-East, North-West, West Midlands and Yorkshire & Humber. These will focus regional media attention, as they cover the major provincial urban centres – Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield. In all these but North-East (where Tyneside has local elections, but much of Teesside doesn't), most electors will be asked to vote locally as well as for the European Parliament.

The remaining four English regions complicate the pattern further: all have a scatter of districts with local elections, but no media-stimulating concentrations similar to the metropolitan areas. Around half the people in Eastern and South-East will get the chance to vote locally; many fewer in South-West and least of all in East Midlands. Finally, Scotland will be unique in Britain (as London was in 1999) in having only Euro-elections, having chosen (unlike Wales) to hold its local elections simultaneously with its own parliamentary vote.

All this complicates the effects on European turnout. In 2004, the removal of the 1999 ballot-weariness effect will boost turnout (over 1999) most of all in Scotland and Wales but not at all in London (note another factor in London: it has easily the youngest electorate, so any age-related changes in turnout will affect it differently). Quite distinct will be the effects of bringing other people out for this year's local elections, most of whom will probably then use their EP ballot paper. That effect should be most pronounced in Wales and London, least in East Midlands and South-West and non-existent in Scotland. Overall, I would expect something like a 4-5 per cent rise from these two factors, varying greatly from Wales and North-West at the top end to East Midlands and South-West at the lower end.

So, even if everyone were still required to go to the polling station, or obtain a postal vote by request well in advance (as last time), these three effects could easily raise turnout to approaching 30 per cent. That is before we take into account the innovation of all-postal ballots in four regions. But leave 30 per cent as a benchmark for the seven British regions voting in the traditional way. If turnout in them were well below this (even if above 1999), then it implies that the specifically European side of these elections has repelled more people than was the case five years ago. If turnout in the polling station regions rises above 30 per cent, then it implies some real increase in interest in voting about European issues.

### **Why some all-postal ballots?**

This innovation will further increase turnout. Since 2001, the Electoral Commission has been supervising experiments in local elections designed to get more people to vote.

These include electronic voting and flexibility with places where, or days when, a ballot paper is put into a traditional box: none of these had much effect. In contrast, sending ballot papers out by post, to be returned by post (or personal delivery), doing away with the traditional polling station altogether, had a marked effect. Thirty-two English local authorities tried such all-postal vote pilots in May 2003. In all but one (which unlike the rest used the standard declaration of identity) turnout was 40 per cent or over. The Electoral Commission waxed lyrical in favour of the 31 who modified or dispensed with the declaration of identity and wants to make this form of all-postal voting the norm for local elections. If turnout alone is the test, the Commission is right: the increase in turnout produced nears 20 per cent, and some pilot local authorities approached general election levels (Herefordshire, with 58 per cent, scored best).

So when last September, the Labour Government asked the Electoral Commission to consult and recommend up to three European electoral regions for an all-postal vote experiment in June 2004, it was building on that experience. It required the experiment to include all local elections held in those regions, and ruled out London (Why? Had the reason turnout stayed up a bit London in 1999 not been understood?). The Commission, after listening principally to the professional administrators and local authorities who would be responsible for running the experiment, came to a cautious conclusion last December. Only one region (North-East) was judged highly suitable; the East Midlands just made it. So only two regions were thought well enough prepared, with Scotland identified as a possible third. North-West and Yorkshire & Humber were both considered and ruled unsuitable, essentially on practical grounds – and that from a Commission which, to use its own words, ‘strongly believes’ in all-postal voting in future local elections (*‘The Shape of Elections to Come’*, July 2003, para. 4.57).

Meanwhile, political pressure had been building up within the Labour Party for all-postal ballots at local elections. Since the decision to combine European and local elections had now been taken, and Labour had most at stake in the all-out local elections across the North (nothing this year in Scotland; London earlier ruled out), the Government added North-West and Yorkshire & Humber, making four pilot schemes, as the bill went through Parliament. That led to an unusually protracted exchange between Lords and Commons, and a lot of constitutional hot air about the respective roles of elected and appointed chambers and of the significance of the independent Electoral Commission’s role. The Lords stepped back from the brink, and just before Easter over-burdened electoral administrators were given little time to arrange the radical experiment.

## The effect of all-postal ballots

If this was a cynical partisan decision by Labour to boost its chances in the metropolitan boroughs, it was in the tradition of Mrs Thatcher's self-interested decision to abolish the six (all Labour) elected metropolitan county councils two decades ago. If last year's local election effect is a guide, it will nearly double the 1999 turnout in the four chosen regions (the northern trio all polled just under 20 per cent), adding another extra tranche (probably about 5 per cent) to the overall British turnout. If fears expressed by some peers (and others with experience of the 2003 trials) are fulfilled, it will also lead to rows about fraudulent misuse of ballot papers. Will it alter the result, politically?

In one small way it must. The four all-postal regions are more Labour than the rest of Britain; in 1999 Labour won 33.2 per cent of the vote in them, but only 28 per cent overall. So if every party's voters are equally encouraged to put more ballot papers in the post, Labour's overall share of the British vote will rise (without winning it one more seat). A simple calculation is to double every party's 1999 vote in these four regions, and see what it does to the percentages. In each of the four, of course, the percentage distribution remains identical. As Tory and Liberal support across the four is similar to the rest of Britain, their national shares are unaffected. But Labour's rises by 1.2 per cent, at the expense of the 'Others', mostly Scottish and Welsh Nationalists (a by-product of the experiment is to increase the weight of English voters in the British total). These two parties are only concerned with their own national share, so they won't notice. But it is important that commentators do: Labour's probable bonus of 1 per cent or so should be discounted in any 1999-2004 voting comparisons. The actual Tory lead over Labour in 1999 was 7.8 per cent; had there been four all-postal ballots then, it would have been under 7 per cent.

Will Labour make more real gains than that? The evidence of last year's local elections suggests Labour did a little better in the 32 trial-run districts in 2003 than it did nationally. But these were clustered in the North, and in 2003 Labour was holding its ground against the Tories (but not the Lib Dems) better in the North than in the Midlands and South. Comparing regionally, there is no discernible difference south of the Trent. But in a handful of the more traditional industrial northern wards, Labour may have won seats because of the all-postal ballot. What is remarkable is that any difference is small; apathy affects all parties' voters in similar degree, and the differences between places (or types of community) and, even more, age groups, are far greater.

Because the Labour government was so keen to impose all-postal ballots, their opponents have already started talking as if they will have a partisan effect (a useful way of discounting any Labour gains). And amongst many Labour Party members,

there has long been a subliminal belief that low turnout hurts Labour. The myth persists, especially among lazy journalists, despite contrary evidence (Labour's victories in 1997 and 2001, accompanied by drastically declining turnout; the local pilots in 2003). When the results are in, analysts will strive to find if Labour has even one more MEP than if it had listened to the Electoral Commission.

That is not to say that all-postal voting will have little political effect; it could make a big difference to the campaign. Ballot papers have to be sent out by post well in advance of the polling day. Many voters will send their ballots back at once; almost all (i.e. all bar the few who hand-deliver on polling day) must have voted before eve-of-poll arrives in the rest of Britain. Thus anything that happens in the last week of the campaign will have much less impact in the postal voting belt stretching from Newcastle to Northampton, and anything that happens in the last couple of days will practically have no impact there at all. The parties will presumably adjust their campaigns accordingly (pity confused voters living in places where regional TV area and electoral region differ).

However, nobody can tell what may happen unexpectedly, in Iraq, on the continent or at home. If there is any event in this period with half the impact that the Madrid bombings are thought to have had on Spanish voters, we will know for near-certain; most Birmingham, Edinburgh and London voters will have been able to take it into account, whilst most Leeds or Manchester ones won't have. In its examination of the pros and cons of postal voting, the Electoral Commission appears to be astonishingly uninterested in the impact of the change on the role of the election campaign. It may be that the most significant lessons about all-postal ballots to be drawn on and after 13th June will be on what it did to the election debate, rather than any administrative problems or partisan political effects.

### Lessons from past campaigns

Is it unrealistic to talk of a European election debate in this context? British media coverage of EP campaigns has been minuscule; results have been interpreted for their domestic impact. Typically on BBC *Newsnight*, the scores that British parties get in European elections are put on a graph of change over time. This brings together all elections in Britain, with EP elections no more than a thermometer reading of the national political temperature at five yearly intervals in the month of June, just as local elections (until this year's synchro-elections) have been registered on the same graph as an annual political temperature reading taken each May.

This reflects the simple fact that in Britain, as throughout the EU, most people who vote in EP elections vote for the national party they normally support. Only in Denmark

have Euro-specific parties (anti) appeared, though ad hoc Euro-specific lists (pro and anti) have sometimes been presented in France. So in using Euro-elections to register party support, some voters do what the *Newsnight* graph wants them to do. This was evident in Britain in 1979 and 1984. Whatever was said about Europe in the campaigns, voters seemed to be making domestic points. In 1979, it was that Mrs Thatcher deserved a honeymoon. In 1984, it was that Labour's replacement of Michael Foot by Neil Kinnock deserved a slight (but only slight) boost, while the Liberal/SDP Alliance needed a jolt (which it ignored, to its cost in 1987-9) to sort itself out. British parties noted this behaviour, and the pundits' interpretation, and have increasingly treated Euro-elections simply as part of the domestic election schedule.

No governing party has ever done this more than Labour in 1999. Its campaign message was essential to play up the government's popularity and argue that if Labour voters didn't turn out there was a danger of letting 'the Tories back'. Voters were offered no explanation of how this risk existed. European issues were almost entirely ignored: the nearest to mentioning them in Labour's party election broadcasts were statements about Blair's leadership in Europe. Certainly the government was popular, riding high in the opinion polls, and Tony Blair's leadership in the Balkans had won plaudits.

Labour, having just done nearly as well in the Scottish elections as it had in 1997, having done quite well in the English local elections, and a month before (most unusually for a governing party) it was to improve its share of the vote in the Eddisbury by-election, polled only 28 per cent of the British European vote. Yet in Westminster elections it polled over 44 per cent in 1997, and 42 per cent in 2001. Why was Labour punished so severely in this one election? Could there have been a clearer refusal from voters to respond to that Labour election campaign?

The 1999 Liberal Democrat campaign was more mixed, with some Europe-related content; but the party homed in on its opposition to the government's restricted spending levels on education and on health, defining the EP election as an opportunity to send a message on these issues. Public opinion polls showed this Liberal Democrat appeal had widespread support. So if voters wanted to use EP elections to send a domestic political message, the Liberal Democrats were well-placed to score – especially as the new proportional voting system meant they should no longer suffer from the wasted vote argument.

Yet it was only this change that saved them. The election of 10 Liberal Democrat MEPs drew a veil over an extremely poor performance in votes. The party's share (12.7 per cent) was smaller than its share in any Westminster election since 1970, and worse than in three out of four previous European elections. This was on the

same day that the party was able to double its share of the vote in the Leeds Central by-election, and a month after the party had done rather well in new devolved elections. Voters refused to use a Liberal Democrat vote in a European election to send a message about something which they did not see as related to Europe.

### **A eurosceptic reward?**

So what was the 1999 European election campaign about? The Conservatives campaigned ardently on a eurosceptic platform and were rewarded amply. William Hague did very much better with his anti-euro ('save the pound') strategy in June 1999 than at any other elections under his leadership (perhaps that contributed to his undoing in 2001, as he wrongly expected that voters would respond the same way in a Westminster election). He was institutionally incorrect; Britain's membership of the eurozone is a matter for the House of Commons, not the EP. But he was talking about Europe, and so went some way towards making the campaign revolve round a Europe-related issue. Since most other parties did not respond there was, however, no debate.

This followed on John Major's unrecognised success in 1994. Compare the outcome then with contemporary election results. In the run-up to those European elections the Conservatives had experienced near total electoral meltdown. They had not held a seat (however safe) at a parliamentary by-election since 1992 and in May 1993 they lost all but one of the county councils. The party's 28 per cent vote in June 1994 was easily its best performance at any election between September 1992 and the general election of 1997, enabling it to return 18 MEPs, 17 of them from areas where the party had recently lost county council control.

It would seem that a number of voters in 1994 and 1999 were rewarding the Conservatives for campaigning about Europe and for expressing their distrust of Brussels. In 1994, they did that rather than using their Euro-vote to express in full measure the anti-government views they were expressing in local elections or by-elections. European election voting has come to be more about Europe than commentators and parties recognise. But does that mean that euroscepticism (or phobia) reaps rewards, while talking about Europe more positively would not?

The evidence from other countries with deep divisions over the extent of their commitment to the European Union, notably France, Denmark and Sweden, is that in EP elections parties with stronger pro or anti stances do better than parties which look both ways or duck the question. In Britain, the more pro-European parties have avoided that approach, leaving European issues to UKIP and the increasingly eurosceptic Conservatives.

## An unclaimed pro-European reward?

There are scattered hints that they may have missed a chance. In Scotland and Wales, the SNP and Plaid Cymru were once hostile to the European Community (both campaigned against at the 1975 referendum). Both have since warmed to the European project, and as they have done so, been rewarded electorally. They have each found a way of building on their particular electoral base, flavouring their nationalism with European spice; both now tend to do systematically better in European than in Westminster elections.

It is no coincidence that all the Nationalist seats at Westminster used to have a strong Liberal vote. All three parties have similar electoral bases, combining an appeal to remote areas or distinctive communities with skilled constituency-level campaigning, tactical squeezing and personal votes for sitting MPs; all three lack the strong class base of their bigger rivals. Yet the Liberal Democrats have failed to find the European bonus of the Nationalists. Have they lessons to learn? Their regular failure to poll as well in Euro-elections as in local or Westminster ones has become so familiar a part of the electoral landscape that we forget how recent it is. It first appeared in 1984 (when it may have owed more to the shaky state of the Alliance), and was dramatically confirmed in 1989 (when it undoubtedly measured the mess that merger was then in). By 1994 a tactical squeeze on Labour votes enabled the Lib Dems to take a couple of seats off an unpopular government; but on their performance in domestic elections in 1993-6, they should have done much better.

Yet if we go back to 1979 we find a different story and outcome. Then the Liberal Party campaigned on a more explicitly European federalist platform than ever since. It came close to getting the same share of the votes it had had five weeks earlier in the Westminster election, more even than the Lib Dems won in 1999 with the aid of a proportional system. We could also recall that when in 1989 Labour made a virtue of its move towards a more pro-European stance, it reaped an electoral reward. Maybe the domestic conditions of 1979 and 1989 played their part; and maybe the long-running systematic anti-European propaganda of a section of the British press makes what happened then of little relevance now. We simply don't know. Neither of the two more pro-European of the main parties seems to want to take the risk.

In 1999 the rebel pro-euro Conservatives took a risk, despite having no real local organisation and lacking either a familiar political face or exposure in the tabloids. The pro-euro Conservatives were disappointed by their performance, yet after a short campaign they outpolled two far better known small parties, the British



National Party and Socialist Labour Party. Thus a brand new small party which talked positively about Europe was better received than small parties which sought to use the Euro-elections to promote their traditional issues.

Then there is the dramatic 1989 result, too quickly forgotten or thought of as just a flash in the pan. In that year, there was an explosion of Green support across Europe. In Britain 15 per cent voted Green. Had Britain then had a proportional electoral system, there would have been ten or so British Green MEPs. Compare this with recent Westminster elections, where the average vote for the limited number of Green candidates (presumably fighting their better seats) has been steadily low around 1.4 per cent. The Greens have never done so well in Britain since, but both 1994 (3.4 per cent) and 1999 (6.3 per cent) confirmed that people are much more willing to vote Green for Europe than Green for Westminster or even the local council. Institutionally, unlike Mr Hague, they are correct, since the European Parliament does deal with a lot of environmental legislation. Some British people may also be more willing to vote Green at this tier because of the credibility Greens have elsewhere in Europe. It is also clear from opinion surveys that a lot of people (including mild eurosceptics) see the geographical point: many environmental problems can best be tackled at continental level. Here again we have clear evidence that parties whose stance seems relevant to Europe get better support at European elections.

To sum up: at each of the last three Euro-elections, while the majority of British voters stuck to their normal party loyalty, of those who didn't, more voted on European issues than used the opportunity to make a domestic political point. Voters deviating from their normal political allegiance were more likely to vote for a party if it struck a clear and distinctive attitude on European issues or had some other clear European relevance. So using the European election result mainly as a predictor of the next Westminster one has increasingly been misplaced, especially after 1999. Then the Euro-elections were counted by Commons constituencies (this time it will be by local council areas in England and Wales); if there had been a simple repetition of European votes seat by seat in June 2001, the Tories would have romped home with 91 more MPs than Labour, and the Liberal Democrats would have lost 45 out of the 46 seats they were defending!

### **What the 2004 campaign could be about**

Apart from UKIP and a stronger euroscepticism amongst Conservatives (flowing more from the party's internal dynamics) there is little sign that British parties have heeded this European lesson. But election campaigns can be unpredictable (prior to Blair's

U-turn, the Tories were planning to make the June 2004 vote a referendum on whether to have another referendum) and events sometimes take over. Indeed, if campaigning gets joined (and here the media have a key part to play), what one party says or does can push another party into responding. There is still time for that dynamic to work, and there are several Europe-related issues which could spark it.

Unfortunately, the most institutionally correct issues are unlikely to do so. The European Parliament now exercises considerable influence on Community legislation, though this accretion of power has not been communicated to most British people. It is easier to go referring to unelected bureaucrats in Brussels even when actual decisions often follow a ping-pong between elected MEPs and elected national governments. The system is too complex to lend itself to easy reporting, and there is no drama in Strasbourg or Brussels similar to the tuition fees vote at Westminster. In areas such as consumer rights or environmental protection, the average MEP really does exercise more power than the average MP; these also really matter to people. But how can this be conveyed? It would be so much easier if rival parties or lists presented clear alternatives. But we are (almost) all broadly in favour of better consumer rights or environmental protection; the devil is in the detail, and how well MEPs stand up against powerful lobbies.

Nonetheless, some awareness that these sort of issues are dealt with 'by Europe' has probably already helped the Greens; the Nationalists have and the Liberal Democrats could also make something of them. The question of GM crops might light a spark in June (that divides Lib Dems, so will they push it?). But a vigorous campaign by such parties, less beholden to producer interests, to promote the European Parliament as the champion of individuals against vested interests (producer-financed political parties, business, national governments etc.) is there for the making. Except that to convey the truth that national governments are indeed vested interests would require a lot of preparation.

### **Left and Right in the twenty-first century**

Another institutionally correct choice lies in the party group arrangement within the EP. Though Left and Right have lost a lot of their old ideological meaning, most national parties (and so most MEPs) still align themselves this way. The 1999 vote shifted the balance in Strasbourg to what calls itself the Centre-Right. The British Conservative leader, Edward McMillan-Scott, had quite properly campaigned explicitly for this to happen, though perhaps this also helped him explain why British Conservatives were linked with europhile Right-wing parties. He was not challenged as to why it mattered whether the Left or the Right commanded a majority, so probably

few British Conservative votes were cast to secure this outcome. There remains, however, a debate which could be staged by some TV programme during this campaign to challenge the two main parties as to what difference it would have made to life in Britain or Europe if there had been a Left-leaning majority in 1999. Are Left and Right obsolete labels today? Or does the 1999 shift at Strasbourg show just how much they still matter? The likely absence of such debate in Britain serves to justify people in not bothering to vote. There are still such media debates (maybe pointless, but they stimulate political argument) in some other EU states.

The effective Centre-Right majority in the outgoing European Parliament was only partly the result of how votes were cast, especially British and German ones, in 1999. It was clinched by what was called a 'constitutive agreement' between the EPP (Christian Democrat-Conservative) and ELDR (Liberal) groups. This ended the previous consensual working arrangement between the EPP and the previously larger Socialist group. Its most visible effect was that the two 'governing' groups (EPP & ELDR) shared the Parliament's presidency, replacing the politically balanced choice of one Centre-Right and one Socialist president. A vigorous election campaign in 2004 would challenge this collaboration. There is plenty of ground for Labour to embarrass Liberal Democrats by demanding to know why they teamed up with Tories in Europe (Are grass-roots Liberal Democrats aware of what their ten MEPs did, and do they really approve it?). Yet there is a Lib Dem response. They won the second presidency of the EP, which shows they hold the balance of power in the European Parliament. The Conservatives can argue that as predominantly Socialist national governments appointed a predominantly Left-leaning Commission in 1999, they needed to work with others to secure a coherent Right-leaning majority in the Parliament to keep a check on it. The ten British Lib Dem MEPs (nine brand new and lacking experience) were there for the trapping.

For such controversy between the parties to be politically meaningful it must be directed towards some exercise of power beyond simple patronage and party games. That may be the nub of the problem for public interest in the Parliament. It does have power, and uses it. But unless the electorate's choice between parties relates to that exercise of power, people will find it difficult to see it as legitimate. Much of the exercise of power at Westminster is also about patronage and party games, yet most people still accept that as legitimate and democratic. It would still be possible to stimulate debate about what having a majority, or holding a balance of power, in the EP has actually meant in the last five years and could do in the next five. It requires two only of the three parties to engage in it, or maybe just some effective questioning by TV interviewers.

## The European Parliament and the European Commission

A much bigger exercise of European Parliamentary power would be over the membership of the European Commission. The Treaty of Amsterdam passed considerable power to the Parliament over this choice, especially that of the President. Events in early 1999 (the ignominious and confused collapse of the Santer Commission) did not make this new power easy to exercise last time. Member governments hastily proposed Romani Prodi to replace Santer; the outgoing European Parliament ratified that appointment in May 1999, ruling the question of the new President of the Commission out of the June 1999 election campaign.

Many leading Europeans (e.g. Jacques Delors and the German MEP Elmar Brok) have called on the party groups to nominate presidential candidates before the European election campaign. If a clear, coherent majority in the Parliament for one nominee emerged then, so it is assumed, national governments would respect it. But although the three main EP groups are supported by what call themselves European political parties, they have not responded to such calls. That is because they are not real parties, interested in taking such power; just loose associations of disparate national parties. Such a clear exercise of power flowing from electors through parties at the European level is not going to happen yet.

British parties are, however, calling for support on 10th June from British voters used to such a direct connection between votes cast and who governs. The European Commission may not be a European government, but it is a clear focus of political power. The question of who will succeed Prodi should figure in the campaign, and if the parties won't raise it, good journalists should. The answer that this is really a question for national governments is wrong; that was changed by the last treaty but one – only by chance did that not become clear in 1999. National governments will propose, but the newly elected MEPs will examine and vote on their proposal. That vote might be the most important one they cast in their five years. Should not the names now being bandied about be discussed in every election debate? If different parties were then to start expressing views about different likely candidates, the election could move towards offering a more real choice.

It may only happen this time in a limited and probably confused way. But if by the tenth of June Party A has said its MEPs are unlikely to ratify a proposal to nominate So-and-So, while Party B has had So-and-So (who is eloquent in English) to speak on its platform, then British voters could begin to make more European sense of a choice between parties A and B. Only one of the two larger parties could play this card effectively, but smaller challengers could tease them over it and persistent interviewers press the question home. Why does the 'Conlab' Party refuse to its voters to know how

its MEPs will respond to So-and-So? How can that be democratic? Even if the question only gets into the margins of debate this time, getting it there will be progress; it raises the fundamental question of what is the point of voting for the European Parliament.

### **Will that dog bark this night?**

There is also the question of the new British Commissioner. In 1999 (when there were two) that was the dog that failed to bark in the night. Neil Kinnock was going to be renominated; but the second, by convention Conservative, place was open. When, just a fortnight before the election, the Prime Minister announced it would be Chris Patten, that was reported in purely domestic terms. The press variously interpreted it as a snub to William Hague (who had proposed another candidate); as an example of Blair's mopping up of the centre ground in British politics; or as the removal of a potential rival Tory leader. The thought that announcing such an appointment in the middle of an election campaign was a snub to the British electorate did not seem to occur even to Tory politicians unhappy with Patten. With their eurosceptic outlook, of course, it would have been awkward to defend such enhancement of the EP elections. But this should not have been a problem for other, more pro-European parties; yet none of them put forward the simple democratic argument that the Prime Minister should wait until the British people had voted and then take account of their wishes.

Afterwards, some extreme eurosceptic Tories argued that Patten's closeness to federalist continental Centre-Right circles should disqualify him. Though British voters may have thought that they were ratifying the eurosceptic line taken by the British Conservatives, any such intention had no effect on the composition of the new Commission. Chris Patten's charm, his obvious qualifications for the external relations portfolio and his generally pro-European sentiments ensured that his nomination flowed through the European Parliamentary hearings more smoothly than that of several other Commissioners.

It could have been otherwise. In 1999 in both the Netherlands and Spain the political views or suitability of a known commissioner-designate did enter into the campaign. It is difficult to discern any consequent impact on the Dutch electorate but in Spain the governing, conservative People's Party appears to have done well out of the robustness of its candidate's defence of her record under fire in a face-to-face televised debate with the Socialist list leader. Why could that not happen in Britain in 2004?

If some present or past Labour cabinet minister is to have their name put before actual MEPs for questioning in a European Parliamentary committee room next

September, why could they not face prospective MEPs in a British TV studio in June? That would bring home the connection between voting in the EP election and choice of a position of political power. And do opposition parties have to accept this as purely a government perk? It would be wholly within the rules for, say, the Lib Dems or Nationalists to say that their MEPs would refuse to ratify 'Peter Hoon' but would accept 'Geoff Mandelson' - so a Lib Dem or Nat vote would be a vote to block 'Peter Hoon.' A handful of MEPs would hardly change Mr Blair's choice. But if parties gunning for 'Peter Hoon' did well in votes, they would gain wider credibility and the government lose it (or vice versa). Unless some British party can find a way of doing something like this, all British parties are likely to go on being disappointed with turnout in EP elections.

### **Events, Dear boy**

Who knows what events may yet do, as Harold MacMillan liked to remind us. The main issue in the campaign was going to be the new EU constitution (or the europhobic distortion of it); then with inter-governmental blockage that issue went away; then the Spanish people embarrassed Tony Blair by putting it back on course (as a by-product of their fear that Bush and Blair had encouraged terrorism by invading Iraq), while Conservatives privately rubbed their hands with glee at how the Spanish Socialist victory helped their agenda; then Blair did to them what Disraeli did to the Whigs in 1867, stealing their referendum policy. Events can still change issues or, as with the Iraq war or another terrorist atrocity, suddenly push something to top billing.

We are talking of what are not properly speaking issues for the European Parliament, but which connect in people's minds with questions about Britain's place in Europe or do indeed have a European dimension. As with anxiety about ecological problems in 1989 or opposition to the single currency in 1999, such issues or events have the capacity to swing a lot of votes even if some or most parties want to avoid them. This is the more likely to happen because lively enough institutionally correct issues are lacking and also because parties have failed to connect European voting to the exercise of political power. The likelihood also reflects the effectiveness of some sections of the British press in setting the political agenda, together with real popular worries.

First is the question of immigration and race (often raised under other terms). Given present full employment and general prosperity, as well as the useful age structure of economic migration, it is not clear why this should have aroused such widespread worry. But opinion polls are clear that it now comes high or first in popular concern. It can clearly be related to the expansion of the EU to Eastern Europe, and also to

common border controls (or internal ones), even if EU decisions in such fields are more inter-governmental and the UK has partly opted out. So it is not unreasonable for it to figure in this election campaign, and so to affect voting.

The British electoral record on this is an odd mixture: some clear impact and a lot of noise producing very few votes. The Conservatives may have won a tiny number of votes (though no seats) in Kent in 2001 by talking about asylum seekers, but if so that was far fewer than indicated by the heat generated locally. However, back in 1970, Enoch Powell may paradoxically have just won the election for Edward Heath with his appeal in the West Midlands. In 2004 the main parties may wish to avoid open debate. But those who feel there is too much economic migration will more naturally vote Conservative than Labour or Liberal, and real events (or distorted media coverage) could trigger that reaction without Tory politicians doing anything. If the issue plays little part in inter-party debate but the Conservatives are felt to have done rather well, it will be difficult to tell at once whether such a reaction occurred.

However, we can identify in advance an area to watch. In the 2001 general election, apart from some rural areas, the Conservatives only made any advance in one part of Britain – South Essex (including two Outer London boroughs formerly in Essex). Here, in the area which had been favourable to the National Front in the 1970s, they gained the only three urban seats they took off anyone that year. Extreme nationalism, blending into racism, has deep, persistent roots here, going back to East End voting in the early years of the last century, and more recently spreading out into much of Essex and eastern Hertfordshire. The Tory performance here in 1999 (compared with 1997) was not special; two years on it was, and has continued to be in local elections since. So the Conservatives ought to gain more ground in South Essex in 2004 (compared with 1999); if they don't, it would suggest that fears about immigration are now having less impact; if their gains here are very strikingly better than their national performance, it suggests such impact is growing.

The other area to watch is the British National Party challenge in North West. Here there is no tradition to tap; racist candidates in the 1960s or the National Front in the 1970s did badly and in 1999 the BNP vote was a tiny 1.34 per cent, well behind an Independent Liberal list. Recent BNP successes in former textile towns like Burnley and Oldham are a new phenomenon, reflecting current, local tensions; these may be there to be stirred in similar towns in the Pennine part of the region, but most of the region is not like that. However, the response, in media attention and by its opponents, has given the BNP credibility across the whole region.

With nine seats at stake, the final seat will probably be won on somewhere around 8-8.5 per cent (see below). There is no way of telling how close the BNP may get to

that. Labour thinks all-postal voting will hinder the BNP; it could as easily help. Combined local and European voting could assist it, as some people may feel they can keep a distance from full support by giving just one of several votes to the BNP (the detail of the BNP's Burnley breakthrough shows such behaviour). Or by bringing more locally aware people out to vote, it might not. All one can be sure of is that the fluke of the ward-boundary review timetable and the outcome of the all-postal voting dispute have made things especially unpredictable. Plus that the North West region with its clear boundaries and a more distinctive regional character than most of England, with a fairly strong media base to fit, has a long tradition of absorbing immigration. So regional campaigning can be more effective there, and regional identity may play a part.

### **The impact of terrorism**

Normally opinion polls record that domestic issues jostle for priority with voters, while foreign/European ones rarely score highly, except in acute crisis. But recent polls show that currently the related issues of the Iraq war and international terrorism vie with the purely domestic issues. How they relate is, of course, a matter for political argument. Either, or both intertwined, could easily be made by events (or news editors) to dominate the European campaign headlines. Their European dimensions are either obvious or disputable, according to whether a party wants them in the campaign. But in the light of the last three campaigns, they are exactly the sort of vaguely Europe-related issues which easily stir voters. Because so many people have real but distant worries about 'War on Terror' or continuing problems in Iraq, but not enough yet to change party at the next general election, they may indeed use their European vote to express that concern.

Terrorism, as such, is difficult to make a political issue; there is no choice to be for or against it. There is, though, real controversy (and choice) about whether identity cards will help, or are irrelevant; and whether they may be desirable on other grounds (or whether having cards at all, or just the compulsion to carry them, is the issue). There is, of course, no real EU dimension to this; it is purely a matter for the British government. But because most EU countries do have an identity card, they can be seen, as with decimalisation or metrication (both decided on by the UK before entry to the EEC), to be part of a European conspiracy to smother the English/British way of life. Those most likely to object on these grounds are those who like to sound toughest on terrorism. It is one of those issues where popular feelings are strong, with the associated sense that it ought to be possible for people to vote on it. So as with GM crops, identity cards might light a spark, in this case rather unpredictably.



If a terrorist atrocity jolts the campaign, it will serve to fan the flames over the profound disagreement about the wisdom of the invasion of Iraq. This has a definite European dimension, since British involvement followed a clear decision to be a faithful ally of the United States at the expense of promoting agreement and co-operation amongst EU governments. It may only be an institutionally correct issue for the European Parliament at the margins; but it is an ideal issue for people wanting to use their European vote to say something about Britain's place in Europe or role in the wider world. Parties with a clear view on that could easily make it a campaigning issue.

Even if the invasion, or the problems of occupation, do not figure directly in the campaign, attitudes struck last year will lead to votes cast this year. Though there may be vote-switching in several directions, most likely is a loss by Labour to anti-war parties and candidates. The opposition of the Liberal Democrats to the Iraq war could make them prime beneficiaries, but there is plenty of competition. This includes established anti-war Greens, Nationalists and the Scottish Socialist Party; the new 'Respect' list, headed in London by George Galloway, stridently anti-war and anti-American; probably 'Forward Wales' (a more substantial challenger involving the former Labour Secretary of State for Wales Ron Davies and John Marek, who was remarkably successful in last year's Welsh Assembly elections as a Labour rebel); and perhaps Martin Bell (who, as an Independent in Eastern may also tap Tory doubters; he declares his opposition to the war but is not standing on that issue).

### **Where to watch out for anti-war votes**

There are three areas to watch. First those regions with concentrations of Asian Muslims. The 2003 local elections and a recent opinion poll both showed a substantial switch of this previously largely Labour-voting group to the Liberal Democrats. They count most in London, followed in rank order by West Midlands, Yorkshire & Humber, East Midlands and North West; but some local concentrations in other regions, such as Luton in Eastern, may show any effect most clearly. Secondly London again: it has two further special factors. The age structure of London's population has changed, making it by far the youngest region; young people were more anti-war. London also has easily the highest concentration of non-British EU citizens entitled to vote in these elections, mostly from countries which were much more anti-war than divided British public opinion.

Wales could also produce an upset. Welsh opinion naturally finds it easier than English to sympathise with small countries resisting big ones; it also has a distinct pacifist tradition, associated historically with Welsh Liberalism and now strong within Plaid Cymru. Labour did particularly well at the Assembly elections at Plaid's expense,

making up ground lost in May 1999 over Downing Street's imposition of its leader, so on its historical support, Labour should easily hold two of the four Welsh Euro-seats. If it loses (or nearly loses) one to the Liberal Democrats (or 'Forward Wales' or Plaid), it would again suggest Labour supporters using their vote strategically (Labour for the Assembly, but – given the war – not for Europe).

As for other contentious issues, some hope the British debate about the new EU constitution will be put off until a referendum. But not only UKIP, the Tories or the eurosceptic press may want to debate it now. Though the debate can be said to be premature until an inter-governmental conference has sorted out remaining uncertainties, that insults the collective British intelligence. An election campaign is where such uncertainties should be debated, with candidates and parties publicly stating positions. After all, in the protracted European way of bouncing issues between institutions and from meeting on to meeting, unresolved questions might go back to the new European Parliament for consultation. And if they do not, an election debate, and its influence on voting, is how democratic governments secure consent or listen to public opinion. Supporters of the EU constitution cannot complain that the Blair government conceded too much to the claim by the Murdoch press to speak for British opinion if it opts out of this more traditional democratic way. If Michael Howard presses for debate about the proposed constitution during the Euro-election campaign, and Labour or the Liberal Democrats are seen to be unwilling to join the argument, the Conservatives will be handed moral victory by default. Voters may well take that into account, whether in June 2004 or at a 2005 referendum.

However, one issue fundamental to the future of the EU may not be raised by any UK party. Already in France and Germany some parties have used the campaign to take public positions on whether Turkey should be admitted to the Union. *Le Monde* recently predicted that the debate about Turkish entry would be 'at the core of the European election'. It raises important broader issues, over what makes Europe European, about attitudes to Islam and whether taking in a portion of Kurdistan (bordering Iraqi Kurdistan) makes sense, as well as specific questions about Turkey's human rights record, the role of its military and the stage of its economic development. The issue may stir few apart from Britons of Turkish Cypriot descent, Kurdish refugees and a handful of Middle East specialists – ignoring it costs few votes. But it is a comment on the state of democratic discussion in Britain today that parties expect to avoid debate on such important questions, in contrast to other EU countries. Avoidance of debate produces a low-key campaign, which in turn produces low turnout.

## The outcome

When, on 13th June, votes are counted for each district council area or Scottish constituency, and results calculated by the 11 British electoral regions, party spokesmen will doubtless search for helpful baselines by which to show how well they have done. It is complicated. Because of EU enlargement, the United Kingdom loses nine of its existing 87 MEPs; with three reserved for Northern Ireland, that brings the total down to 75 in Great Britain. The Electoral Commission consulted carefully about how to do this and decided upon a formula (St Lagüe) fairer to both large and small regions than the largest average (d'Hondt) formula used for distributing seats between parties. This meant that nine regions lost a seat compared with 1999, that is all the British regions but East Midlands and South West. If d'Hondt had been used, East Midlands would have lost a seat and the biggest region (South East) kept one. More interesting symbolically is putting Gibraltar into South West; but its tiny electorate is unlikely to affect South West's seats.

The table on page 28 shows the 1999 results recalculated by the 75 seats now available (in the nine regions with one less seat, the 'losing' party can be picked up from the final column). So rather than comparing gains and losses with the outgoing Parliament, the bottom row in this table is the real base line. As the last column shows, in all but North East the final retained seat was 'won' by a small margin, so small changes in votes could easily switch seats in any other region.

By raising the threshold, the reduction in seats has hit smaller parties most; both Green seats won in 1999 were the last to be allocated in their region and overall the Conservative + Labour share of Britain's MEPs rises from the actual 77 per cent to 80 per cent (for under 64 per cent of the vote). Regional allocation, with the d'Hondt formula, helps the bigger parties (Liberal Democrats just scrape into this category). British Euro-elections are, by purist standards, some way off a fully proportional system. If Labour loses votes on the Iraq war issue to parties or candidates too small to win seats, that may help the Conservatives to win more seats; only if anti-war switchers from Labour concentrate their votes on credible rivals can they be sure to produce anti-war MEPs (recall Ralph Nader putting Bush into the White House in 2000).

There is no fixed threshold for winning a seat. Mostly the last seat allocated goes to a party whose average vote at that point lies at around three-quarters of the total vote in that region divided by the number of seats: i.e. in South East, with 10 seats, around 7.5 per cent, with a range of 7-8 per cent. That formula produces probable thresholds for other regions as follows:

	Approximate threshold	Likely range of thresholds
London, North West (9)	8.3 per cent	7.7-8.8
Eastern, SW, WM (7)	10.7 per cent	10.0-11.4
East Mids, Yorks & H (6)	12.6 per cent	11.7-13.4

In the two smallest regions, Wales (4) and North East (3), the actual threshold will be more a matter of the particular party split of the vote. Thus in North East in 1999, the last (4th) seat went to Labour with an average vote equivalent to a fraction over 14 per cent because two other parties were just below that level. So the 4th Welsh seat could be won on 14 per cent this time, though the theoretical threshold on the formula above is over 18 per cent.

To make sense of the impact of the campaign, we must look at electoral trends since 1999. Generally Labour has lost ground (massively according to opinion polls, but not so badly in actual elections) except in Wales; Liberal Democrats have gained modest ground. The Conservatives have advanced unevenly. In 1999 they performed best in the three northern regions, especially (a tribute to William Hague?) in some parts of industrial Yorkshire. That was not repeated in 2001, when they gained ground only in very rural areas and South Essex (see above page 21). In two years of local elections under Iain Duncan Smith's leadership, the party gained significantly in some districts in the Home Counties and the Midlands but much less in northern areas or most big cities. Under Michael Howard, morale, finance and opinion polls may have recovered, but actual Tory votes cast in local by-elections have been slow to follow. Among the smaller parties, Plaid Cymru dropped badly in the Welsh Assembly elections (making those a better starting base for the Welsh vote in 2004 than the last Euro-elections), while the Greens have both advanced sharply in Scotland and been losing steadily in London borough by-elections.

All that is liable to make voting trends fascinating to unravel for the specialist, and a trap for those wanting to draw quick conclusions on the evening of Sunday 13th June. However, since a broad Government/Opposition measure of support will inevitably be deduced, let us offer an objective basis for it. In June 1999 the adjusted Conservative lead over Labour (see above page 10) was 7 per cent. Four years on, in the 2003 local elections (confirming the 2002 ones), there was an overall swing of 3 per cent from Labour to Conservative, projecting therefore a Euro-election Tory lead of 13 per cent. Local government by-elections up to the end of March 2004 showed no change in that, although the latest ones do show a distinct Tory upward trend. So if the European factor in voting, relative to national party support, works out in 2004 as it did in 1999 then Labour should come in at least 13 per cent behind the Tories. That, incidentally, could mean that the government would be in third place,

behind the Liberal Democrats (who should advance, modestly, 3-5 per cent) across much of Southern England. With the exaggerative voting system, the Tories could win twice as many MEPs. It would indeed appear to be a dramatic result.

If that projection (not prediction) is what occurs, then it would be a pity if it were seen simply in terms of Tony Blair's (or Gordon Brown's, or Michael Howard's or Charles Kennedy's) career prospects. Such a Tory 'victory' would rather confirm the success of 1999 (a European one, not transferable domestically), just as such a modest Liberal Democrat advance would tend to confirm their relative failure to carry national support into the European arena. If the result were to be substantially different from this projection, then that would suggest the European election campaign had had a different impact in 2004 to that in 1999.

That would be a lot better for democratic politics and for the British debate about our place in Europe. It would need argument between the parties over European issues to be joined, and more of the British people to be engaged. The last three Euro-elections have shown some, at any rate, of the British people wanting to do so. Are the British political parties willing to respond?

## Appendix: 1999 Results for 75 MEPs (excluding Northern Ireland)

	Conservative		Labour		LibDem		SNP/PC		UKIP		Green	Last In
	S(eats)	V(otes)	S	V	S	V	S	V	S	V		
<b>East Midlands (6)</b>	3 +1	39.5	2-1	28.6	1	12.8	n/a	n/a	-	7.6	5.4	LibDem 2.9>Con
<b>Eastern (7)</b>	4 +1	42.8	2-1	25.2	1	12.0	n/a	n/a	-	8.9	6.2	Con 1.8>UKIP
<b>London (9)</b>	4 +1	32.7	4-1	35.0	1	11.7	n/a	n/a	-	5.4	7.7	Con 0.5>Green
<b>North East (3)</b>	1 +1	27.4	2-1	42.2	-	13.5	n/a	n/a	-	8.8	4.7	Lab 7.6>LibDem
<b>North West (9)</b>	4 +2	35.4	4-2	34.5	1	11.7	n/a	n/a	-	6.6	5.6	Lab 1.5>Con
<b>Scotland (7)</b>	2 +1	19.8	2-1	28.7	1 +1	9.8	2-1	27.2	-	1.3	5.8	LibDem 0.25>Lab
<b>South East (10)</b>	5 +1	44.4	2-1	19.8	2-1	15.3	n/a	n/a	1 +1	9.7	7.4	LibDem 0.24>Green
<b>South West (7)</b>	4 +2	41.7	1-1	18.1	1-2	16.4	n/a	n/a	1 +1	10.6	8.3	Con 1.4>Lab
<b>Wales (4)</b>	1 +1	22.8	2-1	31.9	-	8.2	1	29.6	-	3.2	2.6	Lab 1.2>Plaid Cymru
<b>West Midlands (7)</b>	4 +2	37.9	2-2	28.0	1	11.3	n/a	n/a	-	5.8	5.8	Con 0.15>Lab
<b>Yorks &amp; Humber (6)</b>	3 +2	36.6	2-2	31.3	1	14.4	n/a	n/a	-	7.1	5.7	Con 1.7>Lab
<b>Great Britain (75)</b>	35 +15	35.8	25 -14	28.0	10 -2	12.7	3 -1	4.5	2 +2	7.0	6.3	n/a

This table shows first how Great Britain's 75 seats are divided between its 11 regional constituencies. The S column shows how the 75 seats would have been allocated by the d'Hondt rule in 1999, together with gains or losses in seats compared with a proportional version of the 1994 Euro-elections. For this the votes actually cast in that election in each region are used to allocate the 75 seats by d'Hondt. The V columns show party percentage shares of the votes by region; no other party polled over 2.5 per cent anywhere except Christine Oddy (Welsh MEP) 4.3 per cent in West Midlands and Scottish Socialist Party 4.0 per cent in Scotland.

A dash indicates nil; n/a not applicable.

The final column ('Last In') shows first the party winning the final seat allocated in each region, followed by the margin by which that party was ahead of the party nearest to winning that seat, expressed as a percentage of the total votes cast in that region. Under the d'Hondt formula, this margin is the successful party's vote divided by the number of seats it has won at that point, minus the nearest party's vote divided by one more than the number of seats it has won.

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© Federal Trust for Education and Research 2004

ISSN 1468-9049

ISBN 1-903403-69-3

Published by:

**The Federal Trust**, 7 Graphite Square, Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5EE.

Tel 020 7735 4000 Fax 020 7735 8000 E-mail info@fedtrust.co.uk

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