

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 9 May 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 9 May 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): To lead our time for reflection, we welcome Rev Shelley Marsh of the Scottish Episcopal Churches in Renfrewshire.

Rev Shelley Marsh (Priest in Charge, St John's Church, Johnstone and St Margaret's Church, Renfrew, Scottish Episcopal Churches): Thank you, Sir David, and thank you, everyone, for the warm welcome that I have received, which really fits in with what I want to say.

During a recent course in my two small churches, a number of us were reflecting on those who receive a welcome into our church and, more important, on those who may not. To help us to be realistic and honest, we worked through a list of more than 50 different types of people, from the obvious to the not so obvious.

It is easy to hide from the truth about ourselves, and the exercise raised our awareness of our hidden prejudices against and discomfort with some people and of our fear and lack of understanding of others. As we became more aware of our inability genuinely to welcome so many from within our community who need, or are looking for, a place of welcome, we became increasingly uncomfortable. We are all human and as such we are imperfect. We can only hope and pray that, by raising awareness, change will come about.

The gospels are a challenge to any who choose to hear them. In Luke, chapter 6, verse 32, Jesus says:

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?"

Ouch! God challenges us to move beyond those we are comfortable with and to look with the eyes of love upon every human being. Everyone is a part of God's creation. We should not be naive. Love can be tough when it has to be, but we need to be open and to show in practical ways that our love is genuine.

Love in this context is not about warm feelings; it is about putting care into action, about commitment, and about perseverance, even in

adversity. Love like that brings healing. A lack of love can leave people broken, but committed love begins to create the kind of atmosphere that enables personal growth, even through the vagaries of life which, for many, is tough.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 7, the indomitable Paul says of love:

"It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Those are some of the ideals of love that many aspire to. We who trust in a being who is love—love beyond our comprehension—reach out to draw strength and power from that limitless source of perfect love, so that we may become more able to love for the good of others, as well as ourselves.

In many of our churches, throughout our country, we pray every week for all of you in this chamber. We pray for you in your work of governing, your deliberations, your judgments and your decisions, which affect the lives of so many. We pray, and in our prayers we believe that we tap into the source of all love, and that that love resources you and our country. Being human, we are frail and liable to make mistakes, even with powerful resources. Perfection in this life is beyond us, but by recognising our mistakes, growing through them, and recognising the love that encourages us always, we can begin again, and again, and again, as often as necessary.

I close with a sentence of prayer.

Fill us, Lord God, with the light of your love for the work we do, day by day. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Point of Order

14:35

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I would like to raise a point of order about the democratic and decision-making processes of the Parliament.

I am not sure whether you are aware that the Housing (Scotland) Bill is progressing through Parliament and that the Social Justice Committee is meeting four times over the next six working days. Amendments to 70 sections are to be lodged over the next three working days. That is placing severe strain on all concerned—I recognise the efforts of the clerks and the convener. The average length of a bill is 25 sections; the Social Justice Committee has to deliver, in six days, what other committees have several weeks to deliver on much smaller bills.

I am concerned about the democratic process and how scrutiny can best be exercised. I ask for your direct intervention to ensure that the standards of accountability and scrutiny that are expected from the Parliament are realised.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): My response is this. The timetabling of stages of bills is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau, as I am sure the member understands.

In this case, I note from the *Official Report* that the Social Justice Committee has discussed the stage 2 timetable that was set by the Parliamentary Bureau. It is open to the committee to ask the bureau for additional time if it is so minded. I advise the member that that is the procedure—it is not really a point of order for me.

European Union

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The main item of business today is a debate on motion S1M-1912, in the name of Mr Jack McConnell, on the impact of the European Union on Scotland, together with two amendments to the motion.

I invite members who want to speak in the debate to indicate that now, to help me with the selection of speakers.

14:36

The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Mr Jack McConnell): Presiding Officer, as you know, today is Europe day.

On this day in 1950, Robert Schuman, the then French foreign minister, presented his proposals for the European Coal and Steel Community. Schuman's vision has become our European Union, the creation of which is undoubtedly one of the outstanding political achievements of the 20th century. It has been central to the economic and political reconstruction of Europe.

In 1950, Europe looked very different. Already divided between east and west and damaged by war, countries across Europe were trying to rebuild. Germany and Italy were developing new democratic structures, Spain was governed by Franco's fascists and Britain was engrossed by the last years of the empire, rather than the European mainland.

From that point on, however, the peoples of western Europe have put centuries of conflict behind them in an economic and political community which recognises that we are stronger working together and weaker apart. For 30 years, Scotland and the UK have joined with and benefited from that success.

We see the impact of that period all around us, in constituencies throughout Scotland. There has been an impact on economic development. Resources have been shared through regional investment in infrastructure and skills improvement, and structural funds of more than £3 billion have been translated into real and lasting benefits for our society. We also see the impact on jobs and prosperity of selling goods and services and attracting investment to Scotland.

Air is cleaner and beaches are safer as environmental challenges are tackled across borders. Critically, EU action helps to ensure that environmental standards, because of their cross-border application, do not harm Scotland's competitiveness. Support has been provided for farming and fishing and for coal and steel communities that have been devastated by

industrial change. In recent years, action has been taken to tackle international crime, drug trafficking and cross-border law enforcement.

The European Union has provided a framework for law and institutions that respects the rights of Europe's democracies, both large and small. The hope and promise of EU membership is now driving political and economic reform across central and eastern Europe.

Last year, on the 50th anniversary, Europe day celebrated the progress achieved by the EU over those 50 years of development, prosperity and peace. This year, we have the opportunity to look to the future and for Europe day to celebrate the deepening and strengthening that enlargement is bringing to the EU. Enlargement can help to ensure a further 50 years—and more—of economic and social development, peace and security.

Scotland has always been an outward-looking country and remains so today. In economic terms, we export more per head of population than the rest of the UK—or for that matter, the USA and even Japan. The EU provides the major market for our exports; 62 per cent of our manufacturing exports and 36 per cent of our service industry exports outwith the UK go to the EU. As Mr Andy Kerr constantly reminds me, even the paint on the Eiffel tower comes from Stewart Wales Somerville, an East Kilbride company.

More than a third of overseas companies now based in Scotland are from EU countries. During the late 1990s, those investments were worth around £0.75 billion and created more than 8,000 jobs. Furthermore, much of Scotland's inward investment from Asia and North America is won because the companies involved can access the European market from the UK.

Today, on Europe day, we reflect on those benefits and our recent past, and debate the future. We hoped that this would be a high-level debate, but yet again we see in the amendments the triumph of opportunism over vision, point-scoring that denies reality and progress and the petty nationalism of both Opposition parties turn insular once again. That said, I welcome the debate and want to set out the choice between two futures.

A Eurosceptic future is dominated by hostility to all things European. Scotland and Britain revert to isolation, fail to engage and influence and let their people down. Beyond the campaign rhetoric about the pound, that is the Tory way and it leads piece by piece towards a Britain—and a Scotland—outside the European Union. Not only would social progress and our contribution to peace be damaged, but thousands of jobs would be lost. Scots can follow that route, or we can choose a

better future where appropriate decisions are made in Scotland, in the UK and in Europe and where we work together in the interests of those we represent by using government at all levels as a force for good.

This year, Europe day celebrations are focusing on enlargement. The main event is an exhibition—which I attended at lunchtime—in the Assembly Rooms on George Street. Although each of the organisers has a stall, I am pleased to say that they are joined by representatives of all the accession states. The stalls provide information about their countries and culture for the many visitors who—importantly—include a healthy proportion of our young people from schools across Scotland. We warmly welcome the presence of those country representatives in Scotland and in the gallery this afternoon.

Enlargement will raise the number of member states from 15 to 28, stretching the EU's boundaries in the south to Malta and in the north and east to the Baltic states and Poland. Scotland fully supports the position of the UK Government as a champion of enlargement. We recognise that enlargement will enhance peace, democracy and stability. Furthermore, it will increase the EU's weight in world affairs, improve economic growth, create the largest single market for trade and investment in the world and give our consumers a wider choice.

Independent research estimates that enlargement could add £1.75 billion to the UK's gross domestic product and Scotland is well placed to secure a significant share of that increased prosperity. In pragmatic terms, the new Europe means a massive increase in opportunity for all its members. Most important of all, the peoples of Europe will be brought closer together by social, cultural and political links.

Successful enlargement of the EU depends on sustained hard work, commitment and patience. That hard work and commitment was in evidence at last December's Nice summit, which was about clearing the way for the accession of the first new member states. The outcomes of the summit, such as the extension of qualified majority voting, vote re-weighting, and the reallocation of seats in the European Parliament, have ensured the institutional reforms necessary to enable an EU of close to 30 member states to function effectively and efficiently.

Nice has allowed the accession negotiations to continue energetically, which will naturally bring a focus on unresolved and often very sensitive issues such as the environment, regional policy and freedom of movement for workers. The summit delivered on the commitment that the EU would be in a position to welcome new members from the end of 2002. The honouring of that time

scale is an important signal to Eurosceptics that existing EU members are fully committed to enlargement and that it will become a reality in the very near future.

Scotland is playing its part. We are the lead partner in a twinning agreement to assist the Czech Republic to develop appropriate systems for the administration of structural funds. We are bidding to support Hungary in the administration of European social fund projects and we are considering a joint development with Estonia and Finland to provide technical assistance on rural development issues.

We also promote European co-operation and understanding through education. More than 200 multilateral school partnerships have been formed between Scottish schools and institutions in continental Europe under the Socrates scheme. Thousands of Scottish students have gone to European institutions to study under the Erasmus scholarship scheme. Our young people are widening their horizons and their knowledge.

The key to enlargement does not rest just with institutional reform and the success of the negotiations. For enlargement truly to be a success, we must ensure that individual citizens in the EU and the applicant countries are engaged in what is happening and we must gain their endorsement. That is a challenge for current and future member states which requires a well-argued and open approach in addressing existing fears—such as those over the loss of jobs or increased migration—but it can and must be taken up.

Although enlargement will help the European Union to compete with the superpowers, it must not create a superstate. Increasing the involvement of regions and nations inside member states will be a key foundation on which to build a people's Europe. We must ensure that our citizens can participate more effectively in the European decision-making process. For that reason, we welcome the review of the governance arrangements that is currently under way within the European Commission.

In March, I attended a hearing of the Commission's team on governance and submitted a joint discussion paper that was produced by the Executive in collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I am pleased that we were able to develop a joint position that reflected our views.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The minister said that COSLA is the umbrella organisation for Scotland's 32 local authorities. However, he is well aware that three local authorities are now outwith COSLA. How does he intend that, in future, those authorities will be represented?

Mr McConnell: About four minutes ago, I mentioned the prospect of having a high-level debate this afternoon. If that is the only intervention that I am going to get in the course of a 20-minute speech, that is pretty disappointing.

First, I did not mention the figure 32: Tricia Marwick has intervened on the wrong point. Secondly, we recognise COSLA as the legitimate representative of all Scotland's local authorities. The local authorities should do so too.

The paper that we agreed with COSLA sets out 11 principles that should be taken into account by the Commission as it frames its governance proposals. We want a greater role for regions of Europe that have their own Parliaments and legislative powers, as they are closer to the citizen and understand better the impact on the ground of the new proposals.

The Commission must consult more widely before draft legislation is proposed on the basis of an agreed code of practice. We have encouraged debate on a subsidiarity watchdog—a variation on the Prime Minister's proposal for a second chamber in his Warsaw speech in October. Such a chamber might comprise elected members from member state Parliaments and from devolved Parliaments with legislative powers. It would have the power to veto or review proposed legislation, which could be better dealt with at a level that is closer to the people.

Those and other reforms could help to bring the EU and its institutions closer to the European citizen. An enlarged EU must respect the cultural diversity that exists within it and that will be further deepened following enlargement. A creative interaction between our different cultures, languages and traditions has, over the centuries, helped to break down prejudices and to inspire innovative and creative thinking.

If due care is taken to give that diversity—which is often reflected at the regional rather than the member state level—the opportunity to flourish and to be heard, the individual citizen will be much more ready to accept greater integration within Europe and to feel part of it. Failure to do that, in a blind move towards greater standardisation, will simply breed alienation, distrust and resistance, and a great opportunity will have been lost. By participating in that debate and building alliances for economic and social progress throughout Europe, Scotland is now in Europe without being out of Britain. As the European Committee is holding an inquiry into governance, we can contribute further to the debate on those issues and I look forward to that.

In conclusion, Scotland is fully committed to a new and reformed Europe. Scotland can sit comfortably within Europe as a strong regional

player and as a dynamic country within a powerful member state, and can work comfortably with new partners to the east.

We have a real choice—a choice of two futures. We can be part of the Scottish, British and European mainstream, taking decisions at the right level, or we can be isolated, lacking influence and impact as others work together across Europe. We can expand the European market, sharing and developing social progress, creating jobs and raising standards from west to east, or we can choke off investment and exports, losing jobs and creating economic instability. Young Scots can grow up in a country at ease with itself and with others, or they can grow up in an insular Scotland or an isolated UK that is weakened by prejudice and increasingly on the margins.

Two weeks ago, at a conference in Krakow in Poland, I discussed the significance of borders and ways in which, with good will and co-operation, their flexible operation can be mutually beneficial to all. Participants, mainly from the accession states, were interested in the example of how Scotland operates within the UK and the way in which we are developing our European identity. As part of that trip, I visited the August Witkowski secondary school in Krakow. The young people there were desperately keen to end the old divides, to rebuild and reunite Europe and to do so as soon as possible. They do not want to feel, or to be, excluded from the European mainstream. We do not want them to be, either. They were excited about what joining the EU would mean. They saw the EU as a tremendous force for good that will improve the quality of their lives and allow them to live in peace and harmony. Unlike Britain's Tories, they could see clearly—unfettered by dogma—the value of membership of the EU. I share their aspirations and I want Scotland be a central part of the bright new future that the EU holds before us.

The motion reflects the facts. Scotland—and the United Kingdom as a whole—has benefited directly from membership of the European Union. It has been a force for peace and progress in western Europe for more than 50 years. A continent that was almost destroyed by two major wars has been rebuilt on foundations of democracy and economic success.

On Europe day, in this new century, we have the opportunity to put our divided history behind us and create a new, enlarged and reformed European Union. It is a challenge, but in a competitive global economy and a world that is still insecure, we can make a difference through the European Union and the European Union can make a difference for us.

Narrow nationalism—either Scottish or British—has no place in that future. In this Parliament, we

represent a nation where most Scots feel Scottish, British and European. Neither Hague, nor Hague's little helpers, the SNP, can overturn those feelings. With a Government that recognises that, things can only continue to get even better.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the events being organised to celebrate Europe Day and the emphasis given in those celebrations to working with the future partners in Central and Eastern Europe; acknowledges the crucial importance of the European Union to investment and jobs in Scotland, as a driving force for rising environmental standards and as a source of support for economic development; welcomes enlargement and the benefits of peace, stability and enhanced prosperity it will bring; recognises, in supporting enlargement, the need for preparatory reforms of the EU institutions and calls for a debate on governance, and welcomes the Executive's joint paper with CoSLA and the forthcoming inquiry by the European Committee as two important contributions to that debate.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I appeal to those who want to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, so that I can work out what the time limit on speeches will be.

14:52

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): The Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs seems a little narky this afternoon. It may be that he was reading out a speech with which he was not entirely comfortable—I detected a singular lack of his normal commitment and verve. I am happy to start on a consensual note by wishing him, you, Presiding Officer, and the rest of the chamber a happy Europe day. That might not have been unknown to our ancestors. I was interested to read in *The Scotsman* this morning that the rulers of ancient Scotland dined on Mediterranean cuisine and drank French wine—no change there, then.

I have no difficulty in supporting most of the Executive's motion. On such a day, it is appropriate that we at least desist from moaning about having to order our bananas in kilos and our flour in grams and instead try to consider the bigger picture. The European Union is all about the bigger picture—it was born out of a determination that the continent should never again tear itself apart in war, and it was built by an equally strongly held belief that the countries of Europe should work together for their mutual benefit. There are times when the Conservatives at least give a good impression of having forgotten those origins. The Tories can wave their pound signs and union flags all they like, but the hysterical little Englander anti-European agenda that has been pursued by successive Tory leaders up to and, I am afraid, including Hague, has kept Scotland on the margins of Europe. Frankly, the European policies of Labour, the Liberal

Democrats and the Conservatives are all anchored in the firm and simple view that Scotland has no right to a seat at the top table.

The title of today's debate, "Impact of the European Union on Scotland", is an eloquent reminder of how the Executive perceives our role in the big picture—we are a spectator rather than a participant. The EU has had a profound impact on Scotland, but why should that work only one way? What about Scotland's potential for having an impact on the EU? This Parliament should not be talking down Scotland's relationship with Europe. What I and the SNP want for Scotland is equality of status with other nations that are independent in Europe. In the meantime, I want there to be a stronger commitment to subsidiarity.

What is the reality of Scotland's impact on the EU? Let us refer first to representation. We have no right to appoint a commissioner and no votes on the Council of Ministers. London Labour has recently negotiated away Scotland's impact still further, by agreeing to reduce the number of MEPs elected to represent Scotland. Scotland is basically being shut out of the main decision-making forums of the EU. When vital decisions affecting the livelihoods of the people who live in this country are being made in Europe, who is there to stand up for Scotland?

Let us consider a couple of examples, starting with fisheries. It would take a real effort on the part of members to fail to realise both how important the fishing industry is to this country and what a difficult time it has been facing over recent years. Almost 5,000 people are involved in the catching sector of the industry alone, and the livelihoods of many more—about 26,000—are dependent on the industry.

It has been said in the past, unfairly, that tiny, landlocked Luxembourg does not have a fishing industry, yet it still has a say in ours. That is not strictly true: there are five folk working at a fish farm in Luxembourg. However, they still have more say over Scotland's fishermen than Scotland does. In the forthcoming common fisheries policy review, a Luxembourg minister will have two votes in the Council of Ministers. When the European Commission discusses fishing, there will be a Luxembourg-appointed commissioner at the table.

In Belgium, that most devolved of countries, the importance of fishing to Flanders has been recognised. As of January 2002, it is the Flemish minister who will, as of right, represent Belgium in fisheries councils. Would that Scotland's fisheries minister had the ambition to demand equal status.

In Scotland, by contrast, we do not have even a guarantee that a Scottish minister would be permitted to attend fisheries council meetings, let alone speak up for the interests of our industry.

The minister who takes the lead for the UK in EU fisheries negotiations is not accountable to this Parliament—his remit does not extend to Scotland. He is able to cast the UK's 10 votes in the council, yet we have no say over how he votes.

That is where those who say that we are better off as part of the bigger UK have it so wrong. If Scotland's interests dictate one course of action, but the interests of our more populous neighbour to the south dictate another, Scotland's interests will go by the board willy-nilly. With direct representation, we could speak for ourselves. On what are probably the much more frequent occasions, when the interests of Scotland and the rest of the UK coincide, there would be two distinct voices arguing for our position, rather than just one. Independence is a win-win situation for Scottish representation.

There are also examples onshore of London Labour failing to stand up for Scottish workers. The recently announced job losses at Motorola were a body blow to Bathgate and to the people who have lost their jobs. However, Labour in Westminster continues to block the Council directive to supplement the statute for European companies, with regard to the involvement of employees. The UK is one of only two member states holding out against that rule change, which, although it might not have saved the jobs in Bathgate, would at least have given the employees extra time, more accurate information and better involvement in the decision-making process.

Meanwhile, developments in the European Union have underlined how different things could be if only Scotland were independent. The minister mentioned the Nice summit. There, the EU came to terms with its anticipated enlargement, a process that the SNP strongly supports. An enlarged EU will give greater weight and prominence to small and medium-sized nations.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I do not know whether Roseanna Cunningham has actually read the points arising out of the Nice summit. What came out of that summit, from the Portuguese, from the Australian Prime Minister and from the Dutch Prime Minister, was the fact—[MEMBERS: "Austrian?"] Austrian. What emerged was the fact that the smaller countries were worse off as a result of the changes in the weighting of the voting in an enlarged European Union. The small countries will have seven votes as opposed to Britain's 29. Does Roseanna Cunningham really think that Britain, Spain and Italy will listen to a country with seven votes when it comes to defending the interests of their fishermen?

Roseanna Cunningham: That is the kind of intervention that I expect from a party that

constantly wants to act alone in Europe without looking for the agreement across Europe that most other countries seek to build before they make their points. I dare say that it was my upbringing in Australia that allowed Ben Wallace to become so distracted from his understanding of Europe as to mix up Austria and Australia—I would not have made such a mistake.

Mr McConnell: Will the member give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: I want to move on a little.

Mr McConnell: My intervention is on that point.

Roseanna Cunningham: On Australia?

Mr McConnell: It is on the outcome of the Nice summit rather than on Australia. I hope that Ms Cunningham will confirm that the outcome of the Nice summit was that the proportionate votes of the smaller countries of Europe will decrease and the proportionate votes of the larger countries will increase. The UK's voting strength in the Council of Ministers and the councils will increase as a result of the Nice summit, and therefore Scotland's power increases, too. The small countries of Europe have done nothing but complain about that since December, but Ms Cunningham wants us to become one of them.

Roseanna Cunningham: That is an interesting and no doubt deeply held view, but it is difficult to understand how Scotland's votes in Europe could get any lower than they are at present, which of course is nil. On the far more numerous occasions on which Scotland's interests would coincide with those of the rest of the UK, the combination would be considerably higher than what is currently proposed for the UK.

At Nice, the EU came to terms with its anticipated enlargement. As I said, the SNP supports that enlargement. An enlarged EU will give greater weight and prominence to small and medium-sized nations. It is clear after Nice, if it were ever in question, that Scotland would have significantly greater influence in the European Union as an independent nation than it has as part of the United Kingdom. It is ironic that while we are being asked today to welcome and support the accession of other, independent European nations to the top table of the EU, the Labour party here and at Westminster is determined to stop Scotland's independent voice being heard in Brussels.

As a result of the Treaty of Nice, as many as 13 central and eastern European countries could gain permanent representation on the Council of Ministers. Scotland in the UK will continue to have no representation there. I think that the Treaty of Nice will safeguard the power of smaller nations in the EU. On the basis of the Treaty of Nice,

independence would give Scotland the right to nominate a commissioner, which is a right that we do not have in the UK. It would guarantee Scotland a seat on the Council of Ministers, speaking rights and seven votes—just as Denmark, Finland and Ireland have. Within the UK, Scotland has no guaranteed right to attend, lead or vote in the Council of Ministers.

While we are on the subject of attendance, the Executive should ask itself whether its deeds match its words. The truth is that the Executive has been content to allow Scotland's voice to go unheard more often than not. Its attendance record speaks for itself. Scottish Executive ministers have attended only around 10 per cent of the meetings of the Council of Ministers that have been held since the Scottish Parliament came into being. On the rare occasions when the Executive has been represented, it has never led the UK delegation, even on fishing, where the impact of decisions on the Scottish economy is so great and so much more important than the impact on the rest of the UK.

It could be argued that the real work is done behind the scenes, and that we should not get carried away with getting faces into a photo call at the Council of Ministers. Perhaps there would be some validity in that argument if the record of Scottish involvement behind the scenes were any better; it is not. Scottish Executive officials have attended just 75 out of 4,500 EU working group meetings, at which many important decisions are taken. Where is Scotland's voice at those meetings?

With independence, Scotland would have 13 members of the European Parliament—the same as for Finland and Denmark, which are independent countries with a population of 5 million, just like Scotland's. As long as we keep our bandwagon hitched to the rest of the UK, Scotland will lose seats in the European Parliament—the number will go down from eight to either six or seven.

What is the Executive's response to that big picture? It has produced a joint paper with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that is startling in its lack of imagination and shallowness of ambition. It is, basically, a list of 11 principles that do nothing more than plead for the right to be consulted. Principle 5, which gives the game away, comes slap bang in the middle of the list. Let me share it with members:

"The EU institutions must respect the Member State's role in deciding the internal allocation of competences between it and sub-national authorities."

Allow me to translate the jargon—members should remember that, in the terms of the document, we are a sub-national authority. Basically, principle 5 boils down to: "Nanny knows best"—that is what

that sell-out principle tells us. The Executive wants the EU to ask it what it thinks but, at the end of the day, to listen only to Westminster. That is pathetic.

The Executive has tied itself up in knots with internal contradictions. I invite members to consider principle 5 alongside principle 3 and to try to work out where the Executive is coming from. Does Jack McConnell want the EU to listen to Scotland or to Westminster? Is he calling on the EU to tell Westminster to butt out of Scotland's business? I suspect that that is what he really wants, and would that he were asking the EU to do that. Alternatively, is he telling the EU that, whatever Scotland says, it is Westminster's opinion that counts?

To be frank, the document shows that the Executive is out of touch with mainstream thinking in the EU. Representatives from devolved Administrations in Belgium, Spain and Germany must be astounded at the timidity of our Executive's approach. Given the record of the UK and the Scottish Executive in Europe, they are not role models for other small countries. If all that the Executive is interested in achieving with its paper is serving its London masters, it is being extremely unhelpful to Scotland.

In contrast, the SNP stands for Scotland. We are just as interested in developing the impact that Scotland can have in and on the EU as we are in examining the impact that the EU has had on our country—that is the one-sided approach adopted by the Executive.

The SNP is in accord with the mainstream of European thinking on the development of the EU. We support the present confederal union in Europe and reject moves towards a European superstate. We support enhanced co-operation in a range of areas and, at the same time, we seek a stronger commitment to subsidiarity, with responsibilities returned to more localised levels where appropriate.

The work has started, given devolution, subsidiarity and debates on governance. We can get the job done with independence in Europe. However, our representatives must lift their eyes and look at that bigger picture. If our representatives will not think big on Scotland's behalf, Scotland will continue to be left behind on the fringes of a rapidly developing Europe.

I would like Jack McConnell to visit Ireland, Sweden or Finland to tell those countries how stupid they are to think that they should have independent representation in Europe. I look forward to him telling those countries how much better off they would be if only they would allow another bigger country to conduct negotiations for them.

The SNP's stance on Europe is part and parcel

of our ambition for Scotland, which is unbounded. The minister may do his Jumping Jack Flash impersonation at events such as yesterday's European connection, welcoming assorted consuls general from the accession nations, but it is a pity that he does not do a reality check—Scotland will not be represented in such a way anywhere else in Europe.

I shall give members a final look at some of those accession nations which, in a few short years, will have more say over Scotland's fishing, farming, environment and industry than we have at present. Estonia has a population of 1.4 million and became independent in 1991. Latvia has a population of 2.4 million and became independent in 1991. Lithuania has a population of 3.7 million and became independent in 1991. Slovakia has a population of 5.4 million and became independent in 1993. Slovenia has a population of 2 million and became independent in 1991. Let us add Scotland to that list.

I move amendment S1M-1912.1, to leave out from "and welcomes" to end and insert:

"but regrets the lack of imagination and ambition shown by the Scottish Executive and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in their joint paper on the subject; deplores the Executive's attendance record at EU Council meetings and poor representation at working groups, and recognises that, after the Treaty of Nice, Scotland would have significantly greater influence in the EU as an independent nation than as part of the UK."

The Presiding Officer: Mr Watson and Mr Sheridan have indicated that they want to speak, but their names are not showing on my screen. Do they want to speak or not?

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP) *indicated disagreement.*

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I pressed the request-to-speak button at the beginning.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Watson is not registered; I think that his card is not properly inserted.

I note that Mr Sheridan does not wish to speak, in which case the time limit for back-bench members' speeches will be five minutes.

I call David Mundell to speak to and move the Conservative amendment to the motion.

15:09

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It is important that we hold this debate, not only to mark Europe day, but to air issues that are too often ignored or oversimplified. An environment has been created in which any legitimate challenge to the current working of the European Union or proposals emanating from it, or not

sharing the cognoscenti vision of the future, is automatically decried by the ruling elite as anti-European. There is a need in Scotland for a proper and full debate about Europe and its future. That debate should not be constrained, because serious issues are at stake that will have an irrevocable effect on our economy, society and sovereignty.

I hope that the UK general election will provide a substantive platform for that debate to take place. I am in no doubt that the Conservative party's overriding principle of being in Europe but not run by Europe will strike a chord with people in Scotland. That is what happened in the European elections when, starting from unpromising polls, the Conservatives managed a national victory by coming first in 12 parliamentary seats in Scotland.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD) *rose—*

David Mundell: Of the two main political parties that will contest the Westminster election with a view to actually running the UK, the Conservative party has been the most consistent in recognising that Britain's future is as a member of the European Union. [*Interruption.*] Many Labour politicians bitterly opposed membership of the European Community on principle and forced Harold Wilson to hold the 1975 referendum. Of course, Labour's views on Europe do not now rest on principle but rest on what focus groups in Milton Keynes say.

We believe that, on any audit of achievement, the European Union has much of which it should be proud. Thousands of British jobs depend on investment from other European countries. Our access to the single market helps to safeguard many thousands more. The European Union can be a driving force for greater prosperity. A successful Europe matters to Scotland.

I do not believe that any person who has the economic, social and cultural interests of Scotland or the United Kingdom at heart could reach the conclusion that Scotland or the United Kingdom should withdraw from the European Union. That there is no support in Scotland for such views was evidenced by the 1999 European elections.

However, there are many legitimate concerns about the future of Europe, particularly at this time of enlargement. There are real arguments to be had on the euro, on governance and on the common agricultural policy. Expressing views and raising concerns is not anti-European. Where the Conservatives stand on Europe is where most people in Scotland stand. They do not want to be in such a tightly integrated union that there is no scope for us being self-governing. We believe that the European Union should concentrate on facilitation of the single market, rather than on

bureaucratic intervention and over-regulation.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

David Mundell: Certainly, as long as it is not about farmers and fishermen.

The Presiding Officer: You cannot place conditions on interventions.

Hugh Henry: I can assure you, Presiding Officer, that my intervention is not about farming and fishing.

David Mundell spoke about integration. Does he agree with the statement that was made by one of his Conservative colleagues, that the Single European Act 1986 provides great scope for further integration?

David Mundell: I probably would, yes.

We want to encourage the European Union to take as its primary purpose the economic well-being of Europe, not the busybody interference in the minutiae of everyday life that we have so often seen.

Enlargement needs to be at the very heart of the current European debate, as Romano Prodi has recognised. Speaking to the European Parliament in October 2000, he said:

"Before enlargement can go ahead, we must implement the necessary reform of the Community institutions. Without the requisite institutional changes, the prospect of almost doubling the number of Member States will pose formidable problems for effective decision-making. Failure to introduce such changes could throw the Union into crisis."

Conservatives go into the UK general election with clear ideas for reform and an undertaking to face down proposals from those such as Herr Schroeder, who clearly have a different superstate agenda. We believe in the need to create a flexible, modern Europe, in which those who take key decisions are democratically held to account. We believe that the European Commission should revert to being an impartial civil service, providing back-up to the Council of Ministers. The Commission's powers to initiate policy should be heavily constrained. The Council of Ministers itself should be revitalised by the appointment of senior ministers from each member state who should attend a weekly Brussels meeting. Of course, if appropriate, that would include a minister from this Parliament. At present, the head of each country's Brussels delegation is typically a career diplomat or civil servant. In future, the minister heading the national delegation would be accountable directly to Parliament. Those are the sort of substantive proposals that Francis Maude has made recently to advance the reform of the EU.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Will Mr Mundell take an intervention? As he is on the subject of

reform, will he clarify the Conservatives' policy on fishing reform? Does he agree with the Conservative party's unequivocal commitment to restoring national control over British waters? Is that the Conservatives' position?

David Mundell: Yes. Sorry—yes is not my answer to the question: yes is my answer to the request for an intervention. Mr David Davidson will touch on fishing in his speech, so members will hear what he has to say on that issue, as they have done on previous occasions.

Enlargement brings with it many threats as well as opportunities. The entry of Poland raises enormous issues relating to Scottish agriculture. Continued membership of the EU offers businesses the opportunity to be part of a market that not even the United States of America can replicate. According to the "Scottish Economic Report" of January 2000, around 63 per cent of Scottish exports go to Europe—exports that are worth £12 billion a year. European companies provide a vital source of inward investment to Scotland, funding 55 projects in 2000 and creating jobs and wealth.

Some of the money received from Europe has undoubtedly improved local economic conditions. I especially commend the initiatives in the Highlands and Islands that brought state-of-the-art telecommunications to an area that would not otherwise have received that investment. Regrettably, some other money has gone too much into the remodelling of roundabouts and other less significant projects—although we welcome the initiatives that Mr McConnell has introduced to seek control of the channelling of EU funding.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): So, no more roundabouts?

David Mundell: No more money spent on the remodelling of roundabouts.

Mr Quinan: Magic roundabouts?

David Mundell: As the European Union grows larger, there is no doubt that European funding will dry up: Scotland will receive less and less funding from the central European institutions. That must not be seen as a bad thing, as it indicates Scotland's relative prosperity. However, we believe that the EU should now be placing an emphasis on encouraging business, rather than trying to regulate its way to economic prosperity.

The expansion of the EU eastwards will have clear benefits for regional peace and security. As markets open and democracy spreads, the expansion countries will be able to offer their citizens a security that they have never had before. The economic and political stabilisation of the expansion countries improves our security.

It is vital that we do not confuse the real security benefits to be had from economic co-operation at state level with the significant dangers that would be posed to that security by further integration of the European security forces. It should be clear that Britain's interests and those of other European countries are best served by retaining NATO as our agent for co-operation in security matters.

Finally, I will refer to the subject of the euro—a subject that Mr McConnell barely mentioned. We should reflect on that fact and the reasons why we never hear the debate being promoted by those who so strongly advocate the case for the euro. We must hear from those people the detailed case in favour of the euro, so that the people of Scotland can make a judgment. The Conservatives have not been afraid to make our argument against the euro, pointing out its implications for the sovereignty and economy of the country. What we want to see in the coming election—and, on occasion, in the chamber—is for those who advocate the euro to have the courage of their convictions and promote the debate.

Mr Rumbles: Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I am sorry, but I am in the last minute of my speech. No doubt we will hear from Mr Rumbles later in the debate.

If those who advocate the euro really believe in it in principle—if they are not driven by opinion polls and get their views from opinion writers in *The Sun*—let us hear them say so.

I move amendment S1M-1912.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"whilst welcoming this enlargement, opposes a single currency, which will undermine our national sovereignty and lead us closer to a federal integrated Europe, and calls on the Scottish Executive to urge Her Majesty's Government to support the development of an enlarged European Union which is based on flexibility, fairness and understanding of a member state's right to determine its own direction on social, economic and foreign policy."

15:22

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I am often amused by the way that people speak of Europe as if it were a foreign country—somewhere else. Europe is here. Scotland and the UK are part of Europe. We are Europeans. Historically, Scotland and most of the UK countries have had strong political, academic, trading, personal and family ties with mainland Europe. It would be madness to turn our backs on the opportunities offered by the current European alliance when Britain has played an integral part in European politics for more than 1,000 years and has belonged to what is now the European Union for nearly 30 years.

Being outside at the start of the initial modern

European alliance—the European Economic Community—cost Britain dear in at least two ways. Between 1958 and 1973, when Britain was outside the EEC, our growth rate fell to half that of Germany, France and Italy. When we eventually joined the EEC, we were joining a club shaped by Germany and France that could have had, for example, a very different common agricultural policy, had we been there to influence its development.

I hope that it is not too late and that we will not lose out again by not being in at the start of the euro. Being outside the single currency has discouraged potential inward investment from across the Atlantic and the far east. Uncertainty about our intention to join the euro has affected London's status as a world financial centre and has given the financial centres in Frankfurt and Paris a competitive advantage. It is important for Britain to be seen to be ready to join the euro as soon as circumstances allow. We need clear leadership on that issue to allay doubts in the financial sector about our intentions and to win the confident support of Britain in moving forward. My colleague Tavish Scott will have more to say on that subject.

In the modern world, co-operation across Europe is key to overcoming many of the challenges that face us: protecting the environment, promoting trade and competition, supporting global development and fostering democracy and security in the wider Europe. Liberal Democrats welcome the prospect of an enlarged European Union that recognises the value of deregulation, competition and the single market while ensuring the protection and extension of the civil and economic rights of the individual.

Being enthusiastically pro-European Union, however, does not mean unquestioningly supporting everything that the EU does. On some matters—security, the environment, the single market and human rights, for example—co-operative European action through pooling sovereignty is essential. Sovereignty pooled is sovereignty enhanced, but the EU should steer clear when Europe-wide action is not necessary. The EU should be an organisation that seeks to empower people, not to impose upon them. It should be run in the interests of its various peoples, not its bureaucrats, and its institutions should concentrate on what they can do best, not encroach where they need not.

We have no illusions about the necessity for reform. Last year, after all, it was the Liberal Democrats who first lodged a motion calling for the resignation of the two commissioners who were most guilty of mismanagement. However, we believe that it requires a strong commitment to the

European Union to hope to effect change within it. Member states have recognised that the piecemeal process of reforming the EU has raised legitimate concerns among the people of Europe about the methods and objectives of integration. It is obvious that the EU can retain popular support only if it is clear and open about its structures and ambitions, and about what it can and cannot do.

At the Nice summit in December last year, it was agreed to call an intergovernmental conference in 2004 to discuss proposals for a constitutional settlement for the European Union. Liberal Democrats would like a constitutional convention to be established, with representatives from member state Governments, national Parliaments, the European Commission and the European Parliament being charged with drawing up a constitution for the EU.

First, the constitution should define and limit the powers of EU institutions, by entrenching the basic law of the European Union, setting out clearly which decisions should be taken at which level and guarding against any unnecessary concentration of powers. Secondly, it should set out the rights of individual citizens, with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union at its heart. Thirdly, it should enhance transparency by clarifying and simplifying the European treaties. Fourthly, it should provide a stable and legitimate framework for the democratic development of European politics at all levels.

We know from our own experience some of the pitfalls of working out a blueprint in advance, but they are easily outweighed by the advantages. With the same emphasis on consultation and involving ordinary people in drafting the blueprint that happened in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, it would be a good way to proceed.

The objective of reform must be to focus the scope of EU action on those areas for which EU-wide action is indispensable. That means that the principle of subsidiarity must be fully respected, and that decisions should be made at the most appropriate level of government that is nearest to the citizen. On the subject of subsidiarity, Scotland is benefiting from devolution from the UK Parliament, and we as a Parliament in turn should be mindful of our responsibility to devolve decision making to local government, and local authorities should give community councils their rightful place. For subsidiarity to work properly, it has to be respected and practised at all levels.

To me, the Scottish Parliament is about better government. The same is true of the European Union. In a world where countries are increasingly interdependent, it is common sense to deal with certain issues co-operatively on a larger-than-national scale. Pollution, for example, does not recognise man-made borders. Transport networks

carry people and goods across borders, and trade and investment flow in global currents. Natural resources are shared, fish being an obvious one, as fish do not recognise our boundaries.

The common fisheries policy has been a disaster in many ways, and needs—and is about to get—a radical overhaul, but the situation would have been immeasurably worse without it. The EU green paper on the CFP is refreshingly honest about its shortcomings. It is now up to us to work with the other member states to devise a better policy, which is informed by what we have learned from experience. Above all, we have to involve fishermen fully in developing the policy for the industry. The green paper indicates that that has been recognised.

It seems natural to follow one set of initials with another. I alluded earlier to the CAP—the common agricultural policy—a long-running policy, which has been changed considerably since its inception at the outset of the EEC. Historically, it is the most resource-consuming of Community policies, although its share of overall resources is diminishing. Major CAP reforms that took place in 1992 and 1999 tried to tackle the initial effect of the CAP in creating surplus production. More recently, the scope of the CAP was broadened to include support for environmental protection in the countryside and rural economic development. As we face the foot-and-mouth crisis and the even more daunting prospect of picking up the pieces in the aftermath of the disease, Scotland can bear witness to the rightness of that direction and emphasis.

A strength of the European Union is its ability—because of what could be described as its collective clout—to tackle environmental issues in a way that individual countries cannot. Acting in concert is a bit like joining a fitness class with a friend—each party polices and encourages the other, which minimises backsliding and sets higher targets. The influence of the collective European drive has meant that higher environmental standards have been set, which we have had to meet. It is fair to say that that has also been true of the equality and human rights agendas. We would in any case have aspired to all the goals, but EU legislation has more firmly driven action to achieve them than we would have without such legislation.

Much of the debate on matters European revolves around money. Massive amounts from structural funds have assisted peripheral and rural areas in Scotland, as well as areas in transition, such as those where traditional heavy industry has been lost. The current round of structural fund programmes extends to 2006 and is likely to be the last from which Scotland will benefit significantly, because of the EU's forthcoming enlargement. The new member states will soak up

structural funding, but their strengthening economies will make them better trading and business prospects. The other obvious benefit of enlargement is that it ties more countries in Europe into co-operation, which will increase political stability and preserve peace. The more that we have of that the better, in contrast to the events in the Balkans and the middle east.

Allocation of resources is a powerful means of effecting change. The workings of the European Union show that in many ways. Every year, the EU provides financial support for operations and projects that it recognises as having a European dimension in fields as diverse as culture, research, renewable forms of energy, urban policy, telecommunications and multimedia. It has provided part-financing for technological research and development projects of strategic importance that have involved companies, laboratories and firms in countries of Europe. In addition to the direct benefits of the research, there are intangible benefits in better understanding and cohesion between countries when their people work closely together.

We can nail the myth of what Herr Fischer, the German foreign minister, described as the

"nightmare of the British Eurosceptics, the so-called superstate",

which he said was

"nothing but a synthetic construct that has nothing whatsoever to do with European reality."

A letter from the leaders of France and Germany to our Prime Minister in June 1998 made their position clear. It said:

"The objective of European policy has never been and cannot be to build a central European state, ie a centrally organised Europe. All our efforts must be directed instead at creating a strong European Union capable of taking action, while preserving the diversity of political, cultural and regional traditions."

I will give Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, the last word. In Berlin last March, he said that

"far from advocating a centralizing role for 'Brussels', I believe the time has come for some radical decentralization. It is time to recognize that 'Brussels' is all of us: Europe is not just run by European institutions but by national, regional and local authorities too and by civil society".

That is a good note on which to end. The EU is not separate from us. We are the EU and we have the opportunity and the duty to play a full part in how it operates and develops.

15:34

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Having spent other Europe days with colleagues abroad, today's debate has been interesting so

far. I welcome Nora Radcliffe's positive contribution.

I want to begin by taking that process a little bit further by quoting the German writer Goethe, who once said:

"To know someone here or there with whom you can feel there is understanding, in spite of distances or thoughts unexpressed—that can make of this earth a garden."

That is an inspiring quotation. For me it transcends borders, boundaries, language, class, race and gender. It encapsulates a spirit of basic humanity, of social progress, opportunity for all and equality, which it is important to recognise today on Europe day.

I chose to quote Goethe, as he too epitomises Europe's shared heritage. He was born in Frankfurt, educated in that very European city of Strasbourg and influenced, we understand, by Shakespeare and our own Thomas Carlyle, who translated many of Goethe's works into English.

The European Union to me has always been about developing those things that unite us at the same time as recognising and appreciating the great cultural diversity that exists throughout Europe. That is recognised by the majority of Scots, and indeed the majority of British people, who continue to support UK membership of the EU.

We owe it to our people to have a mature debate on the future of the EU, away from some of the more lurid headlines that, unfortunately, occasionally scar our press and media. It is regrettable that some of the more bizarre myths that have found their way into the press include stories about Brussels bureaucrats renaming brandy butter "brandy spreadable fat" and replacing square gin bottles with round ones just to ensure a level playing field throughout Europe.

Such stories are humorous in a way, but they detract from the opportunity to have a rational debate on the real issues. When we have that debate, it is important to remember two things about the EU. First, we have now had 50 years of peace in western Europe. The EU's part in that cannot be underestimated. It is no coincidence that the first European community was set up to regulate coal and steel, the raw materials of war.

It would be unwise to take that peace for granted. Europe is not free from extremism. We are all aware of the role that is played by Jörg Haider in Austria. Add to that the emergence in the current Italian campaign of Gianfranco Fini's neo-fascist National Alliance, the party of Mussolini. On Europe day, we must be vigilant to the threat that racism and xenophobia pose to decent-minded people, who must stand together against such extremism, in favour of solidarity and peace. I am sure that all members could agree on that.

The second noteworthy aspect of the European Union is the desire to promote opportunity for its people. The common market is about removing barriers to trade and movement, benefiting the peoples of Europe by increasing opportunity and prosperity. That model is being copied around the world because it is beneficial. It has been accompanied by progress in other areas. The motion mentions environmental standards as an area in which much progress has been made. I also welcome social progress, such as the part-time workers directive, the social chapter and the progress that has been made on equal pay through the European Court of Justice.

One other area that I will mention is maritime safety. The EU has recently proposed a European maritime safety agency. Given Scotland's strong maritime heritage—the Scottish Maritime Museum is in my constituency—I have written to the minister to suggest that Scotland's case for such an agency should be made. I would welcome in the minister's closing speech an indication of what progress is being made on that matter in conjunction with colleagues from Westminster.

On Europe day, let us send out a positive message about Europe, one that is free from the headline-grabbing legends that are peddled by Europhobes. On enlargement, in the spirit of Goethe I ask that we extend the hand of friendship from Scotland to the new candidate countries and say, "Welcome. Much has united us in the past and we look forward to extending our partnership with you in future." The nations and regions of Europe have a shared heritage as well as their own identity and, with that, a commitment to democracy and equality. In those shared values lie our greatest strength. I support the motion.

15:40

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The Executive motion as it stands is anodyne. While it is worthy, it lacks vision and aspiration. To be fair, arguably the minister has gone further than some in his own party had either anticipated or are perhaps comfortable with. However, the pace of change is accelerating. Scotland remains stalled on the starting blocks while, all around, the race is under way. Let us be clear: Europe is changing. No amount of Euroscepticism or Europhobia will wish it away. The choice is whether to be an active participant or an idle bystander. As the negotiations commence, Scotland stands mute and emasculated.

The European Union is where Scotland's social, economic and political future lies—not simply in the union that exists but in the one that it will become. I have no doubt that, in due course, not only the 13 applicants but other parts of Europe that are currently peripheral will be brought on

board, and I welcome that. There are problems in enlargement, but the benefits outweigh the deficits. If we are to address the growing problems such as economic migrants, the environment and organised crime that were touched on by members from other political parties, enlargement is not simply a recognition of a global economy but a prerequisite.

Can Scotland play an active part as things stand? Quite simply, no. The enhancement and expansion of Scotland House in Brussels is to be welcomed. However, Scotland House is not a resident envoy with accredited powers to attend and participate in the affairs of the states in the European Union. Arguably, it has as much legitimacy as the representative of a nation as the heirs to the Jacobite throne. I seek not the restoration of the Stuart dynasty but the powers that will allow Scotland to have a say in its destiny.

The inadequacies and failures of British representation have been pointed out before and I do not need to recite them. However, the damage to Scotland was not done by the European Union per se but resulted from the inept and inadequate representation of Scottish interests by the British state. Fishing and steel communities testify to that. Even those who argue for membership of the EU, but within the British state, fail to aspire. That is a legitimate point of view, but it is not as good as independent nation status in the European Union.

Let us see what is on offer within that. If we contrast it with what is done by the state of Flanders, we see that the difference is marked. The First Minister and the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning congratulate themselves on announcing—perhaps unannounced to others in their own party—a Scottish attaché to Washington. While that is an advance on a tartan gift shop, it is not an envoy with status or power. In contrast, in every Belgian embassy, no matter where it is situated in the world, there is an economic attaché representing the state of Flanders. Moreover, Export Vlaanderen, the Flemish export agency, has about 43 representative offices worldwide, which are able to sell and promote Flanders in every shape or form, and powers to negotiate and sign trading agreements with nation states.

Within the framework of the British state we cannot disguise our neutered status with a flagpole and a brass plaque. Scotland House will not suffice. The only way in which we can participate effectively for our citizens and economy is as an independent nation with full member status. If we do that, we can play a full part in building not only our own nation but the European vision that others have touched upon.

Whither Europe? The parameters are not simply a choice of Schroeder or Hague. Others who represent the interests of small nations are

espousing a different line. Scotland should support the concept of fields of responsibility that is promoted by the Finns and recognise the confederal, not federal status of the European Union. We can cheer on the likes of Finland and Ireland from the sidelines, or we can work with them from within. As part of Britain, we are spectators. As an independent nation, we are participants. We can take part in decisions, or we can have decisions taken for us. Now is the time for Scotland to enter on to the international stage.

15:45

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland)

(Con): In supporting the Conservative motion, I want to set the record straight. Despite all the nonsense talked about our policies by Labour and its subsidiary party, the Liberal Democrats, and by the nationalists, the Conservatives have been the most consistent in recognising that Britain's future is as a member of the European Union. Members will remember well the scepticism of Labour and even Tony Blair preaching withdrawal. There is much myth and hype about our policies for Europe, but it is important to recognise that we want a European Union that is successful.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will Mr Davidson give way?

Mr Davidson: I shall give way in a moment.

It is important to recognise that we want a European Union that is successful and is a community of nation states working together to provide stability and economic growth across Europe. Even William Hague recently rejected calls—[MEMBERS: "Even!"] I say that because of the tone of what is being written in the press just now. William Hague clearly rejected the idea that we would withdraw from the European Union, and that is a fact. Indeed, since we have—and have always had—a policy of enlargement, we are hardly likely to withdraw, but we need to get Europe on the right track.

Alex Neil: Did David Davidson read the comments by the man who took us into Europe, Sir Edward Heath, who said yesterday that the existing Tory policy on Europe was so lunatic that it made the Tory party totally unelectable?

Mr Davidson: I am sure that Sir Edward Heath is entitled to his view, and I hope that he has a very pleasant retirement when he leaves the House of Commons in a few weeks' time.

We joined the European Union to promote free trade, which has benefited Scotland greatly. We must not dilute that opportunity by further complicated regulation. Blind acceptance of employment law changes will almost definitely affect the ability and desire of Scottish small and

medium enterprises to expand. Labour has consistently shown a failure of leadership in Europe, particularly over fraud, mismanagement and accountability. It has failed to contribute a positive vision for the modern, flexible, multisystem Europe that the majority of Scots desire.

As David Mundell said, the Conservatives want to be in Europe but not run totally by it. We seek a flexible Europe, not a one-size-fits-all model. Tavish Scott intervened to mention the common fisheries policy. We have said clearly time and again in this Parliament that we want to reform the CFP and that we want to move to either regional or zonal management. The model of the North Sea Commission is an example of how that could work.

Tavish Scott: Mr Davidson referred to what his party has said in this Parliament. Does that mean that there is a different policy in Westminster from here? The *Fishing News* is very clear when it refers to the Conservative party's unequivocal commitment to restoring national control. Is that the policy of the Conservative party?

Mr Davidson: I am not sure whose letter Tavish Scott is quoting.

Tavish Scott: Is that Conservative party policy?

Mr Davidson: I am not aware of that. Struan Stevenson, our fisheries spokesman in Europe, confirmed his complete support for our policy yesterday. It is well documented on the web. I am happy to talk to Tavish Scott about it later.

We want to see Europe set down the road of enterprise and job creation, not overburdening bureaucracy and interference. We certainly suffer from that because of the way in which the current Government gold-plates regulations coming from Europe. That has affected the fish processing industry. As the EU enlarges, it will become ever more diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, language and expectation. That is a strength and we must not stifle it by dumbing down and encouraging a more bureaucratic approach.

Even Gordon Brown has talked about trying to retain control of the economy in this country, rather than having it run by unelected and unaccountable bodies in Europe. History has demonstrated that economic integration leads to political union. If we accept the euro, we accept that Europe will dictate our economic policy and therefore our future employment prospects.

Mr Quinan: Will Mr Davidson give way?

Mr Davidson: I must move on.

The euro will remove the ability to use interest rates as a tool of economic management, as the Irish have found to their cost. So far, Labour has

not completely destroyed the economic legacy that we passed on to it. Part of that is down to management of inflation.

Less than a quarter of the British people are in favour of joining the euro: 58 per cent of Labour voters, 63 per cent of Lib Dem supporters and 84 per cent of Conservative voters are opposed to the euro. In the 18 to 24 age group, 80 per cent are against joining. Those are the people who will develop our economy in the future. They already recognise the damage that joining the euro would cause. It would cost business millions of pounds, money that would be better spent on improving the public services that Labour is failing to deliver.

Taxation is much higher across the EU. Our corporation tax is 30 per cent; the European average is 44 per cent. Under Labour, our tax burden has risen to 38 per cent of GDP, but that still compares better than the average of 45 per cent in the euro zone. Our national insurance contributions run at half that rate.

The Liberals do not seem to have much to contribute. I hope that today we will hear something from them about their policy on Europe. I suppose that we will get more rhetoric from the nationalists about independence. We would like to hear some indication today of what the nationalists want to see as the conditions for joining the euro and whether those are achievable. It would be very nice if an SNP member could tell us that.

The Conservative party will, throughout the general election campaign, expose the need for a debate on Europe. I hope that, as David Mundell said, we will get clarity from other parties.

15:51

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I asked David Davidson a straight question about fishing policy. In fairness to him, he gave me a straight reply on the policy of—I presume—the Scottish Tories in the Scottish Parliament. The policy is entirely fair. The trouble is that every Westminster candidate—as far as I am aware from the leaflets that I have seen from Westminster candidates—supports the line that is given in the *Fishing News*. The Conservatives have two different policies on fishing.

Ben Wallace: Will Tavish Scott give way?

Tavish Scott: I will finish this point, Mr Wallace. I will come to the Tories later.

It is the height of hypocrisy to lecture the rest of us on being clear on a policy when the Tories espouse different policies in Westminster and in Scotland.

I welcome today's debate, on Europe day, and I welcome the public exhibition in Edinburgh. It is

surely the right approach for the capital to concentrate on Europe and the young people of Europe. Scotland's children have two advantages over most of us. First, they do not hold any of the prejudices that we seem to hold about Europe and, secondly, they are invariably learning a foreign language, which is to be commended. My daughter, who is at primary school, can already slaughter me at French. I know that Mr McConnell is encouraging us all to do our best on foreign languages, so perhaps Mr Stephen will wind up in Spanish.

I will concentrate on the Tories' amendment. Despite mentioning the euro in the amendment, the Tories have been noticeably silent on it in their speeches so far. David Davidson challenged us to be forthright and clear about such matters. I will set out some arguments about the euro, on which I hope we can campaign around the United Kingdom—and certainly in Scotland—in short order. It is an important issue for the future of the country.

Mr Hague was on television this morning, on his soapbox, surrounded by signs demanding that we save the pound. Instead of taking the facile approach of the Conservative party, let us consider the potential benefits of membership of the euro and the single currency.

There would be more trade: independent research illustrates that joining the euro could triple trade between the United Kingdom and the euro zone over 20 to 30 years. There would be greater prosperity: independent research indicates that the more we trade, the richer our economies and our people can become. There would be lower prices: competition that comes from having the same currency causes prices to converge; general economic advantages flow from that. There would be greater stability: caught between the euro and the dollar, the only predictable thing about sterling is that it is likely to head off in unpredictable directions and, as the amount of capital flowing through financial markets grows, the volatility will only increase. Above all else perhaps, we would have greater influence: from the heart of Europe, Britain could lead from the front and propose policies that are in line with this country's priorities.

If we remain outside the euro, we will be taken less seriously by other European countries and so will find it harder to set the European agenda.

Mr Davidson: Will Mr Scott tell us his conditions for entry?

Tavish Scott: I will send Mr Davidson a very important publication produced by Chris Huhne, a Liberal Democrat MEP, which goes into considerable detail on exactly that issue. The document was published extensively at the

beginning of the year and makes a positive and constructive contribution to the debate, which is something that the Tories never do.

I will debunk two Tory myths about the euro. The Tories claim that joining will mean higher unemployment, but we are talking about a common currency, not a common industrial policy. Unemployment is falling in many European countries—notably France and Germany—and at the Lisbon summit in March, all European Governments committed themselves to creating 20 million new jobs by 2010. Are the Conservatives against that?

The Tories also claim that joining will make us all less British, Scottish or whatever. One leading politician said:

"It is a myth that our membership"

of Europe

"will suffocate national tradition and culture. Are the Germans any less German for being in the Community or the French any less French? Of course they are not."

I am sure that the Conservatives would agree with those words from Margaret Thatcher.

Unlike the Tories, the Liberal Democrats strongly support putting the option of joining to the country, through a referendum. The Tory position is best illustrated by a recent comment in *The Observer*, which said:

"If people go into a referendum thinking 'I haven't a clue about the economics'"

of the argument

"then we have won because they will go on their visceral instincts".

It is depressing to think that such a debate will be won not on the strengths and disadvantages of a particular case.

The Conservative split on Europe centres not just on fisheries, but on many other aspects of European policy—indeed, on whether we should be in Europe at all. The split is between those who seek to renegotiate and those who seek outright withdrawal and between those who rule out joining the euro in the next Parliament and those who rule it out for ever.

The leader of the Conservative party, William Hague, said:

"I'm against the single currency on principle, and that means for the foreseeable future."

"On principle" means "never". I contrast Mr Hague's position with that of two Conservative candidates. Patrick Nicholls MP said he

"wouldn't vote to go into a single currency in any circumstances whatsoever".

David Curry said:

"The United Kingdom should retain the option of joining."

The Conservative stance on Europe is an unmitigated shambles. It is part of the Parliament's job to concentrate on the real issues surrounding the single currency, instead of considering the negative nonsense peddled by the Conservatives.

15:58

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): First of all, I declare an interest. I am an executive committee member of the European Movement, which is a cross-party organisation, and have been a paid-up member of the Labour movement for Europe for more than 30 years. I have believed in the European cause for longer than I care to remember.

I invite other MSPs, their staff and the general public to consider joining the European Movement, which is a worthwhile organisation that presents the facts about Europe instead of the media's fiction. It is typical: just as *The Herald*, *The Scotsman* and other newspapers have no media representation in Europe, we have a very empty reporters' gallery in the Parliament. Members from all parties will lament that fact.

The prize that Europe offers is the prize of peace, which was the fundamental reason why we joined Europe. I congratulate my colleague Irene Oldfather, who so passionately described why every MSP must care about extending the hand of co-operation, understanding and friendship for the benefit of all the peoples of Europe.

Being part of Europe offers other prizes; we have won some, but there are many others we still have to strive for. I want to commend to members some of Fife Council's success in attracting EU funding between 1997 and 1999.

This is the first time that we have talked about local government involvement in the European Union, although it is vital. It is not just about central Government—Westminster, European Parliaments or the Scottish Parliament—talking in Europe; there is a place for local government to talk in Europe as well. Fife Council's work has been noted throughout Europe and I shall outline some examples of it.

Between 1997 and 1999, Fife Council attracted more than £5 million of EU funding: £3,990,696 for its own projects and £1,172,323 for partnership projects with the private sector. Fife Council can demonstrate the effectiveness of such schemes in providing training and job opportunities throughout its council area. Given that Fife has had one of the highest levels of unemployment in Scotland, that work is important. Fife's largest EU programme is funded by objective 2 money, which is provided for restructuring in areas that are suffering industrial

decline. It covers the travel-to-work areas of Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy, thereby also benefiting people who live between those towns.

I could list many other programmes, but there is one in particular that I want to highlight—the partnership, involving Fife Council, that is about to bring the roll-on, roll-off ferry to Rosyth. I look forward to the day when the minister formally announces that the roll-on, roll-off ferry from Rosyth will happen. That project would never have been established without the partnership, understanding and friendship of colleagues in mainland Europe.

I want now to address our colleagues on the virtually empty Tory benches. As David Mundell is the only one left holding the flag, I shall direct my comments to him. It was disingenuous of his colleagues to pretend that they are supportive of the European cause. Kenneth Clarke and Michael Heseltine have been marginalised within the Tory party because they hold positive views about Europe.

Whether the Tories are proposing reserve powers to end Britain's commitment to the EU treaties, totally rejecting the possibility of joining the single currency or supporting the discredited notion of joining the North American Free Trade Agreement, their message is clear and unequivocal: they want to withdraw from the European Union and they are prepared to do so, whatever the cost to Britain.

I say to David Mundell that we all know that the Tories are prepared to undermine Britain's interests to pursue their narrow political ideology. They are prepared to sacrifice the 3 million jobs that depend on our trade with the EU and they are prepared to reverse the massive advances that have been made in social and environmental legislation. They are prepared to see Britain isolated in an era of globalisation. I hope beyond all hope that the day never comes when the Tories regain power, because that would be to the massive detriment of the people of the United Kingdom.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are here to make a difference. Our challenges in Europe are enormous, but we must hold true to our reasons for founding the EU. We are here to make a difference and we shall make that difference, remembering that peace is the prize above all prizes.

16:03

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I add my voice to the debate because I am passionately in favour of the European Union. I feel that passion because I am old enough—I am older than everyone else here—to have been a

child of the war. One of my brothers served in the tank corps and the other went missing for most of the war. My sister was caught in the London blitz and when the doorbell rang in our Glasgow tenement, my mother jumped. That was my war.

There were 50 Jews in our class at Queen's Park school, because it was near the synagogue. Of the many poor Jewish children in Europe, very few were rescued. Today's Europe is about never allowing that to happen again. There are war memorials in all European countries, just as there are in every village and town in Scotland.

I have spoken about Europe hundreds of times, in secondary and primary schools and in colleges, and I have encountered a growing pro-Europe feeling, especially among young people who care passionately about the environment.

I want to try to emphasise some of the positive elements of Europe, of which there are many, as has been said. Europe has a good record of commitment to the third world, human rights, discrimination laws and the environment—many environmental improvements would not have been made but for European solidarity, which sometimes dragged Britain in. Europe also has a good record on culture. When I was chair of the European committee with responsibility for culture, I had the honour of introducing the Socrates-Erasmus scheme. To me, the Socrates-Erasmus scheme was simply part of Scottish history, as our students have always gone to universities across Europe—Bologna, Valladolid, Paris, Leyden and so on. The scheme merely enabled us to revert to a chapter in our history.

I tried to play my part in Europe in other ways. I was fisheries spokesman for the third-world countries and visited 28 of them in that capacity. John Hume and I introduced the budget line for minority languages, of which there are 33 in our European Union. I played my part as well as I could.

Our special relationship with America is misunderstood by many European members. They ask whether Britain is in or out. They read about the sceptics and the silly statements in the tabloids, which we have heard about today, and they end up asking, as Charles de Gaulle did, "Has England yet joined this community?" For once, I do not object to the inaccurate use of the word "England".

I do not like the attitude that the part played by small countries in Europe is inherently a target for ridicule. I know that the unionist parties do not agree with the SNP's main plank, but I point out that, far from being a matter for ridicule, it is normal to want to run one's own country. It is normal to want to be at the top table of Europe, to be represented on the Council of Ministers, to

have a commissioner and to hold the presidency. It is normal for a country to think that it can negotiate better for itself than another country can.

I want to deal with the myth that annoys me. The myth that Scotland would not be allowed into the EU was killed long ago. After all, it would be a brave MSP who tackled the expertise of Lord MacKenzie-Stuart or Willem Noë, who said that if a state divides, the treaties apply to both bits. That is what happened when Norway got rid of Sweden at the beginning of the 20th century. The position is clear in international law. It might interest members to know that the Republic of Ireland did not leave the Commonwealth for years after it became independent. The treaties that made it a member continued to apply after it left the UK.

I make no apology for wanting to be normal and independent. I cannot understand why that should be the subject of such ridicule. I cannot understand why we think we have clout when someone else is negotiating on our behalf. Roseanna Cunningham has dealt with these points and there is no point in my repeating them, but I will say that it is strange to boast about the clout that we have, at the same time as little Denmark—a marginal nation in the view of some members—is getting tonnage for industrial fishing, which should be banned.

Scotland is a European country. It has a long history of participation in Europe, from the Hanseatic league to the Socrates-Erasmus scheme and from the enormous amount of trade to the fact that there are a lot of Fife connections to the running of Zeeland which, for 150 years, operated under Scots law—I have the honour of having the revived title of the comptroller of the Scottish privileges, although, I am sad to say, there are not any privileges left for me to be in control of.

Scottish MSPs and MEPs can play their part in Europe well, but they play nothing like the part they would if Scotland were like the other small, but independent, countries of whom I am envious. In 1707, a treaty gave us England and lost us Europe. I think that that was a pretty bad bargain.

16:09

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): It is unfair and wrong of Winnie Ewing and her colleagues to characterise those of us who do not follow their vision of Scotland's role in Europe as ridiculing small nations. Scotland is my nation. I will not have it ridiculed and I am not ridiculing it simply because I do not accept the SNP's policies. There is a meaningful, important and decisive role for Scotland to play in the European Union as it stands.

Kenny MacAskill's talking about our being stuck

on the starting blocks points to the debate to which Winnie Ewing referred, about whether an independent Scotland would be allowed into the European Union. The only answer is that we do not know, because no similar situation has ever arisen or has ever been tested.

Mr Quinan: Will the member give way?

Mike Watson: I will in a moment. If anyone can give me an example that compares to Scotland's situation, I will happily take it on board. We just do not know the answer. The situation has changed since the Treaty of Nice and the break-up of some countries in Europe.

Ben Wallace *rose—*

Mike Watson: I will give way to Lloyd Quinan, as he was first.

Mr Quinan: On that very point, and as Lord Watson is well aware, all the judgments expressed on the seceder treaties, whether made by judges or by constitutional experts attached to the European Union, have clearly said that any part of the United Kingdom—remembering that there is a great likelihood that the six counties of the north of Ireland could well join the 26-county state, making a 32-county Ireland, which would be a natural member of the European Union, in exactly the same way as—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): To the point, please.

Mr Quinan: When Scotland removes itself from the union, it will be a member of the EU.

Mike Watson: We simply do not know. There are conflicting judgments on that.

Irene Oldfather: Will Mike Watson give way?

Mike Watson: I do not really have time to give way again.

We must proceed within the settlement that we have. That is in no way being defensive or divisive. On Europe day, on the 51st anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, I think that it was appropriate for the minister to concentrate on the many benefits that Europe has brought us. I was at the launch of last night's exhibition for the 13 aspirant states and it was clear from talking to representatives of those 13 countries that they see the benefits in the form of jobs and general prosperity and dealing with some of the crucial aspects of restructuring their economies. That is what enlargement is about for them. There will also be benefits for the existing 15 member states. Enlargement will not be an easy process, but the Treaty of Nice set out the basis on which the situation will be progressed.

I am clear in my mind about what the benefits are—they were set out clearly by Irene

Oldfather—but it seems that the Scottish business community is not yet clear about them or fully accepting of them. A recent survey by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry carried out among its members and the companies on its databases, on the euro and European enlargement showed that

"46% think it will lead to reduced influence for the UK and 40% feel it will harm Scotland's position in terms of inward investment."

Most important,

"72% of respondents are critical that there is a lack of information about EU enlargement."

That highlights the need for debates such as this and for more publicity of initiatives such as the Executive's and COSLA's recent discussion paper. There are many good points in it, which need to be highlighted.

We tend to be rather unwilling to acknowledge the benefits of EU membership. They should be acknowledged by all parties in the Parliament, but I regret to say that that is not the case. Predictably, we have heard the churlishness of the Tories, with their narrow, Eurosceptic instincts, and the nationalists saying that they are more interested in erecting new borders than in creating a Europe without frontiers, which is the vision the minister projected.

Tavish Scott mentioned the different Tory positions on fisheries policy. That is not just on the micro level. It is also—I point this out to David Davidson, although I am sure that he is well aware of it—on the macro level.

I contrast the rather muted anti-Europeanism of David Mundell with the words of the shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Francis Maude, who said last year:

"for Britain, integration has gone far enough. We will oppose any further loss of the British veto over EU laws. We will oppose the job-destroying Charter of Rights and we will oppose the creation of an EU defence force outside Nato."

That completely ignored the fact that the Maastricht treaty already contains many of the things that Francis Maude claimed were part of a plot to create a European superstate. Under Maastricht, the scope of qualified majority voting was extended to 13 new areas, the largest extension in Europe's history. It also committed Britain to supporting a common European defence policy.

It will be interesting to see whether, when he closes for the Tories, Ben Wallace tries to reconcile David Mundell's remarks with those of the Tory leadership in London. The Tory hierarchy in London seems determined to deny the people of Britain a say on the single European currency. The Tories are prepared to sacrifice British

prosperity on the rock of their anti-Europeanism.

It is important that Scotland should play a fuller role in Europe. I welcome the fact that we have a minister for Europe and are able to do that. Of course, however much the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs does to represent the Parliament in Brussels, it will never be enough for the nationalists. We have to understand that, even if we do not respect it. We are making progress; we are much more powerful than we were. Debates such as this are needed to highlight to the people of Scotland how important Europe and Scotland are and what their interrelationship is.

16:15

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The Executive motion calls on the Parliament to acknowledge

“the crucial importance of the European Union ... as a driving force for rising environmental standards”.

That may be true, but it is at member state, devolved government and local levels that the drivers are implemented, or not implemented. Those levels are where the real difference is made.

As the minister said, the EU's fifth environmental action programme, between 1992 and 1999, produced tangible results in member states. Some important improvements were made, such as cutting the industrial emissions of lead and mercury. Emissions of sulphur dioxide have been reduced, helping rivers and forests to recover from acidification. In most of the EU, sewerage and water treatment have been improved. I am aware that the EU's sixth environmental action programme, which covers the period until 2010, is the subject of Executive consultation. Before tackling the future, the Government should sort out its past failures. The EU might have been a driver of change, but it is a pity that, in many areas of delivery, successive UK Governments have not provided the vehicles for improvement.

I will take a few examples. Despite the introduction of a basic water quality standard—the bathing water directive—more than 25 beaches in Scotland still fail to come up to scratch. The requirements for such standards have been in place for decades. The original directive—76/160/EEC—dates back to 1976; so much for the track record of successive UK Governments in implementing Scotland's requirements under the European framework.

In 1991, the urban waste-water treatment directive came into force and set the time scales and standards for sewage collection and treatment. Despite a full decade having passed since then, in April this year, the Commission issued a reasoned opinion concerning this

country's failure to fulfil its obligations under that directive. The Commission's main point of concern was the Executive's performance in dealing with eutrophic waters. If the case ends up in the European courts and the Executive loses, any fine or penalty will come out of the Scottish budget. The daft thing is that, under the current constitutional settlement, the Executive could not take the case to the court; incredibly, the UK Government would have to take up the case even if Scotland had to pay. That is another example of why the Parliament needs more powers.

The infraction cases that the UK has lost at the European Court of Justice have cost money and promoted our image as the dirty man of Europe. Eighteen of the 28 or so pending cases lie in the environment or transport arenas; so much for the UK Government standing up for Scotland in EU affairs.

Whether in relation to bathing waters, infraction proceedings, recycling targets or investment in renewable resources, the UK's performance on Scotland's behalf has been dreadful. Things will only get worse, because now we do not even have a dedicated environment minister. More than half the member states of the EU have a dedicated environment minister. Even countries as small as Malta, or countries that have a population as tiny as Iceland's realise the importance of having a dedicated minister for the environment. If ever there was a glaring example of why Scotland needs to represent herself at the top tables of Europe, it is the environment. The UK's track record of failure is there for all to see. As a normal nation, we can stand up for Scotland and transform her into one of Europe's green powerhouses.

16:19

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): David Mundell, who opened the debate for the Conservatives, is almost the acceptable face of Toryism. I tried to intervene during his speech because I wanted to ask—I still want to find out—whether he really opposes the single currency, or whether he believes that nearly all our partners in Europe are wrong on the issue. Are the Tories—like King Canute—holding back the tide of European co-operation?

More moderate Tories, such as David Mundell, have lost the courage of their convictions. I thought that they opposed the single currency only for a while, but they have drifted to a more right-wing position as, throughout the UK, their unelectable party has moved ever rightwards.

Amendment S1M-1912.2, in the name of Ben Wallace, talks about how a single currency would undermine our national sovereignty. I must

misunderstand the Tories' position; is not the pooling of national sovereignty what happened with the Act of Union 1707, when monetary union between Scotland and England took place? Are they afraid of pooling some of our UK sovereignty for greater prosperity and co-operation for all, as happened with the Act of Union? It is great to hear that being said by unionists.

David Mundell talked about greater democratic control of the European Commission. I agree, but is not it interesting that he did not mention the importance of the role of our democratically elected European Parliament? He referred to the European Parliament, but not in that context. What an omission.

I will talk about the advantage of greater co-operation in Europe, which is not just about greater prosperity. Winnie Ewing ably demonstrated what the European Union is about. For seven years, I lived in different countries in the continent of Europe and I was impressed by the acceptance of the single currency as a norm of greater European co-operation. I have come across anti-Europeanism only in our country. I find it quite unbelievable that so-called unionists are so anti-European. The Dutch and the Germans showed animosity to one another during the war, but the idea of breaking down barriers, crossing borders and sharing the same currency is natural to them.

Ben Wallace: Will Mr Rumbles give way?

Mr Rumbles: Certainly.

Ben Wallace: I am grateful to Mr Rumbles for giving way.

In every country that has been asked about the euro and which was in favour of it, the majority has been slim—51:49—and in Denmark, the decision went against the euro. That does not cry out to me that the countries that have been asked about the euro are all enthusiastic about it.

Mr Rumbles: Ben Wallace may take that point of view, but the vast majority of Governments in Europe, of all political persuasions—left and right—are very much in favour of the euro. [MEMBERS: "The people are not."] It is a bit rich to hear about government by the people from members of the party that gave us minority Tory Governments and 18 years of misrule.

I regret the Conservatives' Johnny-come-lately attitude to Europe, which has developed over the years and which we have seen from successive British Governments, from Churchill's view of Europe—good for them, but not for us—to Mrs Thatcher's "No, no, no."

I believe in a confederation of European states, and in taking the "con" out of federalism. Unlike William Hague's Conservatives, we must be

positive about Europe.

Mr Davidson: Will the member give way?

Mr Rumbles: No. I am winding up.

I support the motion. As it says, I look forward to the

"peace, stability and enhanced prosperity"

that a more integrated Europe will bring us.

16:24

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):

We have talked a lot today about what the European Union has done for us. I will paraphrase slightly the words of John F Kennedy, because we should really be thinking about what we can do in Europe—to be specific, we should be talking about what the Scottish Parliament can do to develop the debate about Europe.

Many of our discussions are prefaced by talk of structures, such as the European Parliament and the European Commission. However, while those structures happen to be in Europe and are the structures of the European Union, they are not Europe. The people and Parliaments such as ours are Europe. Many of the myths that have been peddled this afternoon could be dispelled simply by making direct connections—as I have said previously. If we engage directly with other countries that are in similar situations, and with other sub-national Parliaments, on many of the issues with which we are dealing, we will find a European way forward. We should not simply entrench ourselves in what nation state Governments wish us to believe about any given situation.

If there were a Tory Government, the debate on the euro would be on an entirely different basis—if there were a debate. The key point is that we should not depend on London, because British Governments in effect pool their sovereignty with the United States. Many of the decisions that directly concern Europe—which have been made by British Governments of many colours—have been predicated on those Governments' involvement with the United States.

If we want to move progressively forward with Europe, to take Europe to its ultimate end and to make subsidiarity work, the special relationship with the United States must be developed in a different direction. We cannot simply buy guns and missiles for the US and follow it in external military policy, which is what this country does, in effect. The UK pooled its sovereignty with the United States when it accepted its position on the United Nations Security Council. There is little or no room for manoeuvre because of that special relationship.

During the Kosovo crisis, that relationship made the UK a complete laughing stock in mainland Europe. Most of our European partners did not support the bombing of Kosovo or the illegal actions of NATO within the European theatre. We must think about moving towards European defence of Europe without the involvement of the north Americans. Debates on that subject are happening in the other Parliaments of the sub-nation states in Europe.

Lord Watson referred to the fact that the SNP has a particular position. That position is replicated in every national Parliament in Europe. There are parties that have exactly the same position as ours. Perhaps 30, 40 or 50 years ago—or 100 years ago when the Labour party was formed—such parties were not hugely represented in their Parliaments, but they have developed.

We must recognise that Europe is moving and shifting. The recognition of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union must be followed up with our involvement in the development of a constitution on the collective rights of the peoples of Europe, both for those who have political representation and for those who do not. The major debate in Europe is about future governance and a future constitution that serves not only the nation states, but the peoples of Europe.

Within the Baltic states, a number of countries have large minority populations from other countries. As Europe expands, it is vital that their rights are protected not only by nation states, but by the EU. That will require us to enter the debate about the constitution, which will be debated at the intergovernmental conference in 2004. Where do we wish to be? Do we wish to bind this Parliament—and, as a consequence, the other assemblies of a devolved UK—into a nation state position, or will we move forward in a 21st century way by using the concept of subsidiarity to recognise the likelihood that states will emerge from within the EU?

We must take into consideration the fact that the debate about the EU is not simply about expansion from the outside. When we talk about inclusion and equality, and when we talk about democratic rights, we must also recognise the rights of the emerging nations—whether or not that suits politically any party in the Parliament today. That is the reality of the future. Our responsibility is to develop the concepts for the future without simply accepting some things that are not acceptable for our individual parties and ideologies.

Democracy is about a vision of the future. Europe will grow in size—but it will grow from within as much as from without. Each member of this Parliament must recognise his or her

responsibility to take part in the coming constitutional debate. We must start now by engaging with the other sub-national Parliaments, as the European Committee did last week with the Galician Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move now to winding-up speeches. We have a little time in hand, so Hugh Henry for the Labour party has up to six minutes.

16:30

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): The Executive has given us a welcome opportunity to debate Europe in a useful context—the celebration of Europe day. Mr McConnell referred to the events of last night and today. It is worth putting on record our congratulations to the Commission and the Parliament, which worked together to put on such an interesting and stimulating event. The turnout last night reflected the degree of interest in matters European among a certain section of the population in Scotland. It was refreshing last night—and today, despite some of our differences—to have a debate about Europe that was not just about funds, structural funds and what we can get from Europe. Lloyd Quinan, although I may disagree with some of his conclusions, made an interesting contribution on what the future debate on Europe might be.

I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to Winnie Ewing, not only for her speech today but for her work over many years. Although, again, I might disagree with Winnie on many of her political thoughts and conclusions, no one can doubt her passionate commitment to all things European. She has been not only a standard bearer for Scotland and its presence in Europe, but a standard bearer in Scotland for much of what Europe has to contribute. It was very relevant that she touched on some of the issues that we sometimes overlook when we talk about Europe and some of the major contributions that the European Union has made to developments throughout the world and, in particular, in the third world. It should be a matter of immense pride and satisfaction to us that—albeit belatedly—this country has made a small contribution to that process. Winnie was right to remind us of that.

Mike Watson, Winnie Ewing and others spoke about other issues to which Europe has contributed. We should not forget what the European Union and our participation in it have contributed to jobs and the economy. Some of the progress that has been made in the working life of many people in this country would not have been made had it not been for the contribution of the European Union.

Bruce Crawford was right to talk about the

significance of the contribution that Europe has made on environmental issues. Some things that we perhaps take for granted have come about because of pressure from Europe. We need to articulate those facts in our communities and remind people of some of the positive things that have come about. For example, the extension of parental leave rights for Scottish working parents, European Union standards of child care for working parents and many consumer measures have all come about because of European legislation and policy making. That is the positive aspect of participation in Europe.

Unfortunately, we must accept that the context of the debate is not only Europe day, but the general election that was announced yesterday. Tavish Scott was right to point out the absolute confusion among Tories. I sometimes feel sorry for David Mundell and Ben Wallace, who have worked with me on the European Committee. Both have made a very positive contribution to the work of that committee, but they are sometimes strangled by the debate that emanates from the Conservative party nationally.

There is confusion among the Conservatives over integration—in the past Francis Maude talked about the Single European Act 1986 providing scope for further integration, but last year he said that integration has gone far enough. There is confusion over the euro. Having listened to the Conservative speeches today, it is clear that they do not know whether they are against the euro in principle, or whether they simply want to delay entry to it. The Conservatives keep saying that they are opposed to the euro for the lifetime of the next Parliament, yet their language suggests that they are opposed fundamentally to the euro, in principle and for ever. It is about time the Conservatives spelled out their position clearly.

One issue that David Mundell is right to flag up is that, as far as the future of Scotland and our participation in European matters are concerned, people have been given a stark choice between the Conservative party that is led by William Hague and the return of a Labour Government. The debate about Europe crystallises what could happen if we allowed the Tories—by whatever means—to get back into power. For that we should be grateful. David Mundell is almost becoming the Dougal of the Scottish Parliament—from modelling roundabouts to “The Magic Roundabout”.

We should not ignore some of the points that were made by Winnie Ewing, Irene Oldfather, Helen Eadie and others about the fact that there is much that we take for granted. My generation and that of my children take for granted peace and stability, but my father's generation knew the reality of division and conflict—that generation

paid a heavy price. In the debate about Europe and our participation in Europe we should not be afraid to argue that we are willing to play a full role as members of the European Union. Europe has been a force for peace and progress—we should never let anybody forget that.

16:37

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con):

Today is the day to celebrate Britain's membership of Europe, which was taken up by the Conservative party in 1974 against fierce opposition from the Labour party. Britain remained in the EU through the 1970s and 1980s, even although the Labour party constantly expressed differing views on that membership. On seven occasions, the Labour party fought elections from different European perspectives. Indeed, who can forget Tony Blair's 1983 election address, in which he threatened to

“negotiate a withdrawal from the EEC, which has drained our natural resources and destroyed our jobs”?

Mr Rumbles: He has grown up since then.

Ben Wallace: I do not know about that.

At least the Labour party has the freedom to change its mind, as we have the freedom to change our minds. That freedom would be denied us if we were to enter a single European currency. Scotland has benefited from membership of Europe. The free trade that the EEC has founded has allowed Scotland's companies to trade without bureaucratic or customs barriers. The Liberal Democrats and Tavish Scott will, no doubt, be quick to point out that about half of Scotland's exports go to the euro zone. That might be true, but we should ask ourselves why, given that the euro zone has been in existence for the past year, the exports have not stopped. For example, the Eiffel tower is still there and it will still need the paint that comes from Mr Kerr's constituency. It is not going to collapse because we do or do not enter the euro.

Why has foreign direct investment from outwith Europe been increasing year on year at record levels and why is it expected to increase for the next four years? Perhaps the Liberal Democrats should reflect upon the fact that many of our exports to Europe are commodities that are traded for in dollars—oils, plastics, defence and electronics. In fact, early this year, an Office for National Statistics survey showed that 37 per cent of our exports to Germany were in dollar-denominated commodities, excluding North sea oil. That is a lot of money being traded in dollars, rather than in euros.

At lunchtime, I attended a conference at which I gave a speech on the opportunities of EU enlargement. I was delighted to be invited by the

Commission to speak as part of the conference that the minister attended yesterday. I was talking to the applicant countries about what we need to do to push the political will to ensure that enlargement takes place.

The Conservatives believe that the enlargement of Europe will make for a fairer and more balanced Community, which will have to serve the specific needs of the nation states more flexibly, and in a way that does not isolate the people of those countries. Mike Rumbles said that the Governments were in favour of the single currency, but the fact is that the countries that tested public opinion on the euro found that there was not an overwhelming desire to change from one currency to another. We should remember that. Countries should be allowed to follow socialism, or capitalism, if that is their choice.

Europe is at a crossroads, and it must decide which direction it wishes to take. Does it want to adopt a single currency, which I believe will lead to tax harmonisation and further integration towards a federal state?

Mr Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Ben Wallace: In a minute.

Will Europe, on the other hand, rekindle the principles that the Community was founded on, which were free trade and security? Will it embrace the countries in the east, if the cost is less integration and more diversification? We in the Conservative party believe that the latter is the way forward. We believe that a Europe that has more and more sovereign powers and with fiscal and foreign policy at its centre, will not bring democracy closer to the people, but will take it further away, and that a Europe that has unelected bankers dictating social and economic policies on a one-size-fits-all basis is not a viable and sustainable community.

Alex Salmond said recently that the Bank of England was about south-east policies and south-east taxation made by bankers in the south-east for a south-east economy, yet the SNP would hand powers to bankers in Frankfurt. The SNP cannot have it both ways. Indeed, a senior Irish economist—I think that he was the chair of the European Central Bank—said that the one-size-fits-all approach does not work. He was from Ireland, which is straitjacketed by interest rates that it cannot touch and rising inflationary pressures.

Mr McConnell: I have two questions. If the economic conditions were right, and it was right for the British economy in the next five years, would Ben Wallace still oppose a referendum for the British people on membership of the single European currency? Does he agree with David McLetchie, who as recently as 1 February in this

chamber opposed any preparations for Scottish business to cope with the fact that the rest of the European Union will be involved in the euro—even if we are not—in the years to come?

Ben Wallace: I can speak for my party's policy. We will oppose entry to the euro at the next Parliament. That is the first time that we have been asked that question in the run-up to the general election. If there is a referendum, we will allow people to take part—it is not for me to stop people taking part in a referendum—but in the general election we will make our position clear. When a referendum comes along, our position will be against the single currency.

The SNP amendment is curious. It is ill informed. How on earth does Roseanna Cunningham think an independent Scotland with seven votes in the Council of Ministers would have greater influence than the United Kingdom with 29 votes? After the Treaty of Nice, the small countries all said that they lost out and the larger countries gained. The real agenda behind the SNP's desire to join the euro is not about whether it is good or bad for Scotland; it is about us in the United Kingdom being outside the euro, in which case the SNP will have to establish its own financial network and currency, and all the ridiculous trappings that the SNP would have us have, before taking us into Europe.

Mr Rumbles: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ben Wallace is closing. He has only 30 seconds. If he takes the intervention, the time for other members will be cut.

Ben Wallace: Scotland could not join the European Community in the way that Winnie Ewing suggests. It is interesting that she talked about the causes of the war, and I agree, but she completely forgot that nationalism has been a major reason for conflict all over the world, because of the view, "I'm better than you" or, "I want what you've got." Nationalism is not what it is cracked up to be. I have seen it for real. [MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] It is true.

Roseanna Cunningham gave a list of independent countries. To it I add Great Britain, which has been independent since 1707. It has 56 million people, not 5 million; 29 votes in the Council of Ministers, not seven; two commissioners, not a part-time one; and 99 MEPs, not eight. It is a Britain that is not sceptical, and which has real influence in Europe and the rest of the world.

16:44

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): It was a pity, after the debate had been going

moderately well, to hear such an anti-European and anti-democratic speech from Ben Wallace. We should pass over it without comment. [MEMBERS: "Go on."] No, it was not worthy of comment—it was, until about the last minute when it became a nasty rant, but of course that is Mr Wallace's stock in trade.

The curious difficulty of the debate, particularly for the unionist parties, is symbolised by the flags that are flying from the Parliament building. If members have not seen them, they should go and look at them. On the twin towers of the building fly the European flag, for Europe day, and the union jack. No saltire flies from Scotland's Parliament today. That represents what we have heard from Labour members, even—perhaps most particularly—from those whose speeches were most passionate about Europe. That is because the difficulty for Labour and the Scottish Executive lies in reconciling an organisation of sovereign member states, and the opportunity that that offers the people of Scotland, with the powerlessness yet potential of the ancient state in which we live. That contradiction is at the heart of the debate and led to the minister's somewhat listless speech, to which I shall return.

Europe is a difficulty for Labour, but it has been a difficulty for every party in the chamber. It is important to remember that. It has not actually been a difficulty for the Liberals—it just offers them an opportunity to get out more than they usually do. One of the few correct comments that Ben Wallace made was that, as recently as 1983, Labour offered withdrawal from Europe in its manifesto. I suspect that Tommy Sheridan will offer that at the next election, but life is too short to read Tommy Sheridan's manifesto.

The Tories have retreated into political irrelevance, because Europe has split them down the middle. That is the great issue on which the Tory party foundered in the 20th century and continues to founder in the 21st century. Some of the rhetoric that we hear from the Tories—even from some in this Parliament—makes Margaret Thatcher sound like a pro-European.

The SNP has also had its difficulties on Europe. In 1975, the SNP recommended a no vote in the referendum. I was a member of the party, but I voted yes. That was one of the rare occasions on which I have differed from my party.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): You great sook.

Michael Russell: There are no such occasions now, I am glad to say.

The work that has been done in the party since then, by Winnie Ewing and a range of others, has cemented the idea of Europe into the party's thinking and an internationalist view into the SNP.

That view recognises the great advantages of working within a group of sovereign states and is based on the idea of Europe as peaceful co-operation between nations and Europe as the ideal of making that peaceful co-operation not a static, once-and-for-all process, but a dynamic process of ever-closer union.

Jack McConnell referred to the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community by Schuman on 9 May 1950. However, only a decade before that, on 9 May 1940, Hitler gave the final order for operation yellow—the invasion of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg—which started at 5.35 the next morning and involved 2,500 tanks and 75 infantry divisions in the heart of Europe. On 9 May 1941, a 500-bomber raid took place on London. On 9 May 1942, the Red Army launched its first offensive. On 9 May 1944, air raids took place against France—the first to start the process towards D day. On 9 May 1945—just five years before the Community was founded—the German forces on the Channel Islands surrendered. As members have said, Europe was a theatre for war as recently as then. Only 25 years before the second world war started, Europe was stuck in the trenches of Flanders for five years.

The idea was that such events should happen never again. The only way of ensuring that was to bring nations together in peaceful co-operation as equals. That is the key to the debate. Nations were brought together to co-operate with one another.

Mr Davidson: Will Mr Russell give way?

Michael Russell: Sorry, I have some way to go.

It is curious that on Europe day, Mr McConnell took a profoundly anti-European stance. The idea of a group of nations co-operating as equals has been overturned in the Executive's mind because of the angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin argument about Scotland's status and because the Executive cannot admit that Scotland is a nation. The Executive now argues that it is better that big countries speak for small countries. That is a direct perversion of the idea and the ideal of Europe. That anti-European stance led to Mr McConnell's listless performance in the debate today. His is a weak and inconsistent argument, which does not play to the opportunity of Europe but treats Europe as a problem that the Executive must spin its way out of.

That leads us to the wandered approach that Mr Mundell showed us. Mr Mundell cannot look at this nation and see the potential and the benefit that we will get out of Europe, because he too has to hold back. That brings me to the Liberals: I look forward to hearing Nicol Stephen's speech, to see whether the Liberals are making a distinct contribution to the Executive on this matter.

The only logical approach to the debate has come from the passion of the SNP and our realisation that to fulfil what Scotland is capable of, we must be at the top table. The SNP is passionate about Europe because it is passionate about independence. I am old enough to be fond of the SNP words "independence in Europe". That spirit of joining in with Europe will allow Scotland to do the things that she needs to do.

There is a huge irony in the minister standing on stage, as he did last night, welcoming those who aspire to membership of the European Union, yet being unable to see that his actions, his speech here today and the Executive's actions are holding back Scotland from the potential that membership could give us.

I commend the SNP amendment: it is clear, honest and straightforward. It looks forward to a European future in which we will fly the European flag and the saltire outside the Scottish Parliament, and will not have the confusion of not knowing what flags to fly at Scotland's Parliament on Europe day.

16:52

The Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (Nicol Stephen): I think that it was Tavish Scott who challenged me to respond to the debate in one of the European languages. I would have been happy to do so, but sadly the headphones for simultaneous interpretation are not available today. Members will have to wait for another occasion.

Today should be a celebration of Europe day and of the vision that emerged from post-war Europe to become the European Union. Today should be a celebration of key figures such as Robert Schuman and those from our own country, including the likes of Ted Heath, Bruce Millan, Roy Jenkins, Winnie Ewing and, also from the SNP, Allan Macartney—an old political opponent of mine whom I always remember on such occasions. Today should be a celebration of the considerable benefits of the EU to Scotland, and of the close links that have developed over the years with other EU nations. Today should be a celebration of environmental improvements, some of which Bruce Crawford touched on in his speech, of which there are more to come.

Scotland is dependent on the EU for its economic strength: 63 per cent of our manufactured exports go to the EU; seven of our top 10 markets are EU member states and thousands of jobs are created through our membership of the EU.

Today should also be a time—in Roseanna Cunningham's words—to focus on "the bigger picture". It should be a time to refresh and renew

our vision for the future for the EU. We should look forward to enlargement, to Scotland's developing role in Europe, which I believe we have started to see following the creation of the Scottish Parliament, and to growing European security and prosperity, not only economic but social and cultural. Instead, at times, we have heard too much of the language of separatism, scepticism and isolationism. We have heard the Scottish nationalists and we have heard from the nationalists of William Hague's little-Englander Conservatism.

Roseanna Cunningham gave us a tour de force performance in which we got everything bar a new SNP prediction of the date for Scotland's independence. As we get closer to 2003, perhaps she will get a little bolder in that regard. For Roseanna Cunningham's information, and just to correct her remarks, we attend the Council of Ministers, we speak at the Council of Ministers and we lead on behalf of the UK at the Council of Ministers. Indeed, I have led at the education council not only on one occasion, but on two.

Roseanna Cunningham's style was, at times, sour, hectoring and confrontational. It reminded me of a new-age Thatcherite style. Her speech was a classic example of the co-operation and close good will that took us so far in Europe back in the 1980s.

In contrast, David Mundell's approach was much softer and gentler. He said that he wanted a flexible, modern Europe, but he cannot hide the truth, because we saw it last night on the banners behind William and Fion Hague. The Conservatives are determined to play on anti-European prejudice and to make Euroscepticism not just one of the issues, but the focal point of the election campaign. For them, the focal point is not health, education and our pensioners but the same anti-European spirit that has damaged Britain's place in Europe ever since the European Coal and Steel Community was created in 1950. We must remember that it was more than 20 years after that that Britain eventually joined the European Economic Community. We have been dragging our feet, delaying and ducking responsibilities too often and for too long.

Now, in the 21st century, the Tory party has emerged with a more sinister and destructive edge. We heard blind ideology from Ben Wallace in response to Jack McConnell. Ben Wallace said that the Conservatives would not join the single European currency, even if it was the right thing to do and in the best interests of Scotland and the UK.

Let us be in no doubt that some leading Tories—indeed, some nationalists—want us out of Europe. Ken Clarke has described Michael Portillo's approach on the euro as "blithering economic

nonsense". Courtesy of a speaker today, we have also heard some of Ted Heath's comments.

Ben Wallace: Will the minister give way?

Nicol Stephen: No, I will not.

Michael Heseltine, commenting on his own party's approach, said:

"Every Conservative Prime Minister since Harold Macmillan has recognised Britain's self-interest could be pursued only if our political leaders took their place in the councils of Europe and fought there for that self-interest ... Increasingly, the language of today implies the psychology of the empty chair. There is a growing band of party members who would like to remove the chair from the table altogether."

Just to show how friendly he is to William Hague on the issue, he finished his remarks by saying:

"The last time so substantial an abdication of British interests was advocated by a major political party occurred when the extreme left ran the Labour Party in the 1980s."

There were many good, back-bench contributions to today's debate, for example from Tavish Scott, Mike Watson, Hugh Henry and indeed from Winnie Ewing herself. I did not agree with everything that she said, but she made a fine speech. Irene Oldfather asked about the current situation relating to the European Commission proposal to establish a European maritime safety agency, which would involve around 55 staff, in a centre to be located somewhere in the EU. Irene Oldfather has made a powerful case for that agency's location in her constituency. The Executive is liaising closely with the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions on that issue and we hope to be able to announce progress in that area in due course.

Let us return to the key issue—the future—and to this new century in Europe, and let us start with the big issues that were touched on by Mike Russell. Let us remember where Europe started, with the issues of peace and security. Europe's history in the past century is one of millions and millions of lives lost. As Winnie Ewing reminded us so vividly, memories of the war are not so far away for some people.

Let us focus on the opportunity that we have for greater economic growth and stability, for the creation of thousands more jobs, and for hundreds of millions of pounds of new investment in Scotland. We have cultural and social opportunities and the opportunity for greater influence, both for Britain and for Scotland. I tell Roseanna Cunningham that our benchmark is not Estonia, but it is not the little Englanders on the other side either.

I remember the Tory approach. I first visited the Commission back in the 1980s—I was welcomed there by Winnie Ewing among others. I remember being impressed by the open, friendly and

responsive way in which we were welcomed by commissioners from other EU countries, until we met one of the British commissioners, who was cold, distant and disinterested. Now, the Conservatives' supposedly pro-European views are represented not by the moderation of David Mundell here today, but by the mediocrity of William Hague's philosophy and approach. I want no part of that in Scotland's approach to Europe.

I want Scotland to develop its own place, its own style and its own role—a role of growing influence and importance in Europe. That is our challenge, and it is a challenge on which we are determined to deliver.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committee—

the Justice 2 Committee to consider the draft Sex Offenders (Notice Requirements) (Foreign Travel) (Scotland) Regulations 2001.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I invite members to check that the light in front of their card is out, so that their vote is recorded.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-1912.1, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1912, in the name of Mr Jack McConnell, on the impact of the European Union on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Mr Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 76, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-1912.2, in the name of Ben Wallace, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1912,

in the name of Mr Jack McConnell, on the impact of the European Union on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Mr Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-1912, in the name of Mr Jack McConnell, on the impact of the European Union on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Mr Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)

MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 0, Abstentions 36.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the events being organised to celebrate Europe Day and the emphasis given in those celebrations to working with the future partners in Central and Eastern Europe; acknowledges the crucial importance of the European Union to investment and jobs in Scotland, as a driving force for rising environmental standards and as a source of support for economic development; welcomes enlargement and the benefits of peace, stability and enhanced prosperity it will bring; recognises, in supporting enlargement, the need for preparatory reforms of the EU institutions and calls for a debate on governance, and welcomes the Executive's joint paper with CoSLA and the forthcoming inquiry by the European Committee as two important contributions to that debate.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S1M-1920, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on the designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committee—

the Justice 2 Committee to consider the draft Sex Offenders (Notice Requirements) (Foreign Travel) (Scotland) Regulations 2001.

Scottish Youth Hostels Association

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-1829, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the 70th anniversary of the Scottish Youth Hostels Association.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA) on its 70th anniversary; notes the contribution made by the Association to attracting visitors both to Scotland from abroad and to the Scottish countryside from within; notes also the opportunity provided by the Association to visit many of the more remote but beautiful parts of our land; welcomes the development by the Association of educational tours which facilitate and enhance the opportunity for youngsters in Scotland to partake in the benefits and pleasures of the countryside; recognises the current difficulties being experienced by the SYHA as a result of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, and urges organisations and individuals in Scotland to show their support in this time of difficulty.

17:07

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): On behalf of Scottish Youth Hostels Association, I thank all the members who have put their names to the motion.

The SYHA was formed 70 years ago this month, a year after its sister organisation in England and Wales. It followed in the footpath of schemes initially trailed in Germany and other north European nations. It started modestly, with a hostel in Broadmeadows, near Selkirk, but has gone from strength to strength.

Today, there are about 70 youth hostels the length and breadth of Scotland. Those hostels vary in their focus and facilities. They go from the most modest bothy to the grandest castle and from the city centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow to the remotest parts of mainland and island Scotland. They not only serve hillwalkers and backpackers, but can accommodate families and even weddings. The age span of people who visit and utilise the facilities and services is not restricted by the nomenclature of the organisation, but extends from babes in arms to the elderly.

The association benefits not only individuals, but organisations, especially those geared towards the young and the disadvantaged. That is entirely within the ethos of the founders. After all, the initial intention was to facilitate youngsters getting out and about within their native land. Even today, 24 per cent of overnight stays are by school and youth groups. In the past year, more than 70 schools have used the service.

The SYHA was founded as, and remains, an

egalitarian organisation, in which ties were dispensed with, lounge suits removed and the merchant banker and the street sweeper donned a common uniform.

Diversity has flourished as the SYHA has mirrored Scotland in becoming more cosmopolitan. The spectrum of guests utilising the facilities has expanded. The pot pourri remains of young and old, rich and poor, active and more sedentary. A growing influence has been visitors from elsewhere within Britain and beyond. The proportion of visitors who came from Scotland used to be 70 per cent; now, 70 per cent come from outwith Scotland and half are international visitors.

We should remember that the association provides a service to local communities; it gives employment and brings in badly needed revenue, often in remote areas. The professional staff of more than 450 employees is added to through part-time and seasonal employment, which provides much-needed jobs in areas where opportunities are few and far between. The hostels are fundamental to the rural economy in many areas.

In places such as Tobermory, the association provides 7,000 bed occupancies a year. According to statistics, those who use hostel accommodation spend an average of £35 to £37 a day. That is a significant input into a fragile and often marginal economy. In some areas, the railway station exists simply because of the hostel; the absence of a hostel would certainly lead to the station's closure. It is not overstating the case to say that communities in some parts of rural Scotland survive simply because of the hostel and that, if the hostel were gone, the community's *raison d'être* would go, too.

What is the situation on the association's 70th anniversary? The past weekend would have seen the anniversary commemorated by a walk from Innerleithen to Broadmeadows, where the first hostel was founded. However, the foot-and-mouth epidemic has led to the cancellation of what should have been a moment of celebration.

The epidemic has placed the organisation—like many others—in severe financial difficulties. Although the Easter weekend was good for the organisation and others, it masked a barren month: the figures for April were 30 per cent down on last year. Some hostels opened late and others are still restricted. I do not like to make special pleading for any particular organisation in this time of crisis, as the crisis affects so many, but there are good reasons for targeting the SYHA and specific measures can be taken.

Before I outline those measures and ask the minister to comment on them, I will quote from a

former Secretary of State for Scotland—arguably the greatest secretary of state we have had—Tom Johnston, who said:

“Without this organised provision of hotels for hikers, great stretches of our country would remain inaccessible to multitudes of the rising generation in our large industrial towns ... The Scottish Youth Hostels Association makes a great contribution to good citizenship. It trains for and encourages good wayfaring upon the highway and good conduct upon the hillside. It provides facilities for good health and exercise, and, in some of the most important and formative years in life, it encourages reverence for the beauties and the glories of the Scottish scene.”

First, local authorities could take some steps. The City of Edinburgh Council, Aberdeen Council and Highland Council do not provide full rates relief for their hostels. The association is a not-for-profit organisation. The urban areas cross-subsidise the rural areas and, as I said, in rural areas there is a cross-subsidy from the hostel to the community. I call on those councils to extend rates relief.

Secondly, although the organisation is cash-strapped, the first cuts will be in maintenance and development. That might make sound financial sense in the short term, but it will restrict growth in the long term. Specific matters need to be addressed that would not only ensure the existence and enhancement of current establishments, but add to the range and variety of the existing portfolio of properties. Cash grants, not loans, are needed, because loans are simply expenditure deferred. Although resources are restricted, I ask the minister to consider meeting financial requests from the available funds to add value not only to the SYHA, but to communities in Scotland in general.

Thirdly, as many local authorities require to cut provision for outdoor education, perhaps now is the time for the Executive to assist in marrying the SYHA's existing fine facilities with the needs of the children in the communities of Scotland. That approach was noted by Tom Johnston back in 1944; it is as apt now as it was then. If we fail to take such an approach, we jeopardise those facilities and we neglect our children.

Finally, although I appreciate that the matter is outwith the control of the minister and the Parliament, it would be remiss of me not to mention VAT. Other nations give a reduced rate either to tourism in general or to youth hostels in particular, and a reduction in VAT would stimulate demand. Moreover, there can be no suggestion that any reduction would simply be creamed off, as every penny is recycled.

Let me once again congratulate the SYHA on its anniversary. As Tom Johnston and others have commented, it has added to the tapestry of Scotland and enriched and enlivened the lives of millions. It deserves all our thanks for its

contribution to the communities and the citizenship of our country. Although the association is in difficulties, I do not wish to end on a sad or sour note.

My message is not simply for the Executive or for any other Administration; it is for us all in Scotland. Few individuals in Scotland have not utilised or benefited from the organisation's facilities. It is up to us to remember how much we gained, to consider how much current and future generations could also benefit and to ensure that we do not just applaud, but take practical steps to give support. If we do that, it will not simply be a matter of paying tribute today. In years to come, future generations will pay tribute, in another building and at another time, at the organisation's centenary and bicentenary.

17:15

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Kenny MacAskill on securing this debate and the Scottish Youth Hostels Association on its 70th anniversary. I believe that the motion received cross-party support, so I am astonished by the absence of Liberal Democrat MSPs—especially as many of the hostels are in their constituencies—and, with the exception of the minister, Labour members. No other members' business debate has not received cross-party support, so today's attendance is extremely disappointing. We all know that a general election has been announced, but this Parliament comes first.

The association, along with many other tourist organisations, is facing difficulties as a result of the foot-and-mouth epidemic. In Mid Scotland and Fife—the area that I represent—the hostels at Glendevon, Glendoll, Killin and Rowardennan were unable to open as usual at the beginning of March. Those at Crianlarich, Perth, Stirling and Pitlochry have all experienced a decline in occupancy; in the cases of Crianlarich and Perth, that has been in excess of 75 per cent. I understand that precise figures for April are not yet available, although the indications are that overnight stays are 30 per cent down on last year. According to the briefing that we received, the association faces a deficit of more than £1 million following a reduction in its 2001 revenue of at least 20 per cent.

Hostels in rural areas have been worst hit. Around a dozen of the 60 hostels still remain closed on precautionary grounds. That not only is a problem for the association, but will result in £4.5 million less being spent this year in remoter areas of Scotland, with a consequent impact on the local economy.

I applaud the proactive stance that the SYHA

has taken and I support the initiatives that it proposes to address a serious situation. I call on the Scottish Executive, the Scottish tourist boards, councils, local enterprise companies and individuals to offer every support and assistance within their powers to help the association—which is such an asset to Scotland—to overcome its difficulties. I support the motion.

17:17

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I congratulate Kenny MacAskill on securing this debate. It is extremely sad that the 70th anniversary of the SYHA has coincided with the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Scotland—an outbreak that has had devastating consequences for the whole rural economy, especially the tourism sector and agriculture. The effects of the outbreak are graphically described in the SYHA briefing, which the minister will have seen. The association faces a deficit of more than £1 million, through a reduction in its revenue this year of at least 20 per cent—a loss of 120,000 overnight stays. Like any responsible organisation, it is now looking to the future and considering how the bad news can be replaced by good news and how it can meet the challenges.

The SYHA has put forward a challenging proposal that is based on the simple premise that all young people should have access to the countryside. The organisation has traditionally provided that first taste of the countryside for young people. Those of us who are somewhat long in the tooth—including me—may find it hard to remember what it was like to visit somewhere else for the first time. However, we should consider children in poorer areas of our cities who know nothing but the surroundings in which they have been born and raised and for whom a visit to somewhere such as Loch Morlich, in Aviemore, must seem like a visit to another world.

That is why I back the idea that all children should be able to enjoy such an experience. I believe that that is the SYHA's central idea—I hope that I have not misinterpreted the association. Bill Forsyth of the SYHA said that, in Germany, every schoolchild is guaranteed a residential hostel experience as a key element of their general outdoor and environmental education. In Scotland, much depends on individual schools and staff and on the availability of funding. Our system seems to be far from satisfactory; I am sure that Allan Wilson will agree with that and will wish to find a way to resolve the situation if that is possible. The solution will not be found without some resource cost. Despite the fact that no other members of the coalition parties are present to listen to the minister's message, Scotland will listen if he says that he is prepared at

least to consider devoting additional resources to ensure that disadvantaged kids are no longer disadvantaged.

I will make one more point in closing—unless I can have five or six more minutes, which I would be delighted to fill, Presiding Officer. The SYHA briefing refers to the Scottish Tourist Board proposal to introduce a new grading scheme of one to five stars. The scheme would affect the SYHA and the independent hostels, representatives of which I met on 27 April. David Dean OBE of Independent Backpackers and Hostels Scotland and Gavin Hogg of Highland Hostels are gravely concerned that, instead of spending resources on the SYHA initiative to bring young people to the countryside, the Scottish Tourist Board will spend goodness knows how much money on introducing a new bureaucratic grading scheme for hostels. The mood of the meeting that I attended was that that idea should be set aside and that there should be a full engagement with the independent associations, which are led by Mr Dean and Mr Hogg, so that a scheme can be arrived at that would guarantee basic standards of comfort and cleanliness and the availability of the facilities that one expects to find in hostels. The feeling was that the bureaucratic scheme should not be implemented. The issue is a matter of grave concern to the independent sector, which operates many hostels in my constituency and throughout Scotland. I hope that the minister will touch on that issue when he closes the debate.

17:22

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Kenny MacAskill on bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Although the estimated total economic value of youth hostels to the Scottish economy is some £20 million a year, that is not the most important benefit they bring to Scotland. It is highly significant that around 70 per cent of youth hostel visitors are from outwith Scotland. Many of those young travellers would not be able to see Scotland in reasonable comfort were it not for youth hostels. Let us not forget that they will fall in love with Scotland's scenery and history and will return in later years—it is to be hoped with fatter wallets—to the benefit of Scotland's tourism industry. They are also important flag carriers who spread the word about the excellence of Scotland as a holiday destination.

Scottish youth hostels fulfil a significant function by accommodating schools and youth groups. It is important that children from urban backgrounds get the chance to sample the Scottish Highlands and are made aware of the alternative rural existence. It is equally important for children from

rural areas to be able to stay in city hostels such as those in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

SYHA bookings in the year up to February 2001 were higher than they have ever been in a comparable period and advance bookings for the season ahead were also higher—but then came the foot-and-mouth disease crisis. Hostels in Armadale and Uig are still closed, as are the ones in Durness, in the far north, and in Helmsdale. Kyleakin hostel, one of the most popular hostels on Skye, saw a fall in its March trade of 32 per cent and Broadford hostel's trade is down by 25 per cent. Popular hostels such as that at Inverary in Argyll reflect the same picture.

The SYHA is a not-for-profit organisation. Any available surpluses are ploughed back, so the unforeseen losses, which may amount to £1 million, will be a great drain on resources and very difficult to claw back. The professional permanent staff of 225 need to be paid, and training and customer care, quality management and safety need to continue.

Some 1.5 per cent of the SYHA's income goes on training programmes. Capital improvements and new investment are constantly needed, such as improvements at the new hostel in Inverness—which cost £2 million—and the extension to the hostel in Oban, which cost £350,000. Investment in hostels is in place only because of their popularity and because they provide a service to people from around the world. It is vital that they continue to function, improve and expand. A further 250 seasonal staff would, under normal circumstances, be employed, but much of the benefit to rural areas that that would bring will probably be lost this year.

Two weeks ago, the SYHA hosted an international tourism conference at Carbisdale Castle in Sutherland, at which 25 countries were represented. That demonstrates the part the organisation plays in promoting Scotland's tourism.

In the aftermath of foot-and-mouth disease, when, I hope, help is given to those who have suffered the worst losses, the SYHA should be placed high on the Scottish Executive's list of priorities. Other bodies that are promoting tourism in Scotland should provide marketing help by promoting a joint project in the form of a partnership with visitscotland. It should reach out to backpackers, other outdoor enthusiasts and educational bodies to bring people back to the youth hostels and to encourage the concept of hostelling in the future. The SYHA is the original green tourism organisation and it deserves our universal support.

17:27

The Deputy Minister for Sport, the Arts and Culture (Allan Wilson): I am pleased to congratulate Kenny MacAskill on securing the debate and I join colleagues in congratulating the Scottish Youth Hostels Association on its 70th anniversary.

The SYHA is an important player in Scottish tourism. Over the 70 years of its existence, the association has provided affordable accommodation and facilities throughout Scotland. The value of that to Scotland and to visitors from many nations in both social opportunity and intercultural exchange is difficult to overestimate.

Many young people from around the world gain their first experience of Scotland through a youth-hostelling holiday. For many, that is an experience that leads to many more visits here in the future. Although they might not always stay at SYHA hostels, the Scotland experience will have been instilled in them. As Jamie McGrigor said, it is Scottish tourism that ultimately benefits from their experience.

Last year, more than 540,000 bed nights were spent in SYHA hostels. The association estimates the value of that to the Scottish economy at about £23 million. That makes the association a major player in Scottish tourism.

One of the reasons for the SYHA's success is that—something like the party I represent—it has moved with the times while remaining true to its original ideals. Different standards of comfort are sought now. When the association started, only a basic level of accommodation was required; today, many hostellers are looking for rather more comfort, perhaps including central heating, showers, smaller rooms and the provision of meals. The association caters for them, particularly at its hostels in the cities and in the main tourist centres.

The association plays a major part in helping to achieve our aim of spreading the benefits of tourism throughout Scotland. As Kenny MacAskill said, SYHA hostels can be found throughout the country. There is an SYHA hostel in Ayr, for example, and there are two in Arran, in my constituency. The first hostel was opened in the Borders countryside and is still popular today. There is also an SYHA hostel as far north as John o' Groats.

I am sure that if Alasdair Morrison was here rather than in his sick bed, he would point out that his constituency, the Western Isles, provides an excellent example. There, the SYHA has worked closely with the Garenin Trust to restore traditional black houses for use as hostels. I can think of no better way to introduce visitors to the unique social history and heritage of the islands.

SYHA hostels can be found on many other Scottish islands, including Mull, Islay, the Shetland Islands and Orkney. As Kenny MacAskill said, visitors provide valuable income to local communities and hostels serve as an introduction to our diverse and wonderful culture.

The enterprise network and visitscotland fully support the SYHA. Hostels feature strongly in visitscotland advertising, particularly overseas. The SYHA is an enthusiastic member of the visitscotland quality grading scheme and visitscotland is discussing the proposals with the independent hostel sector. The scheme is not mandatory, but I understand that the SYHA enthusiastically supports it.

Visitors look to hostels to provide a quality product and the association does that. It is worth noting that the association is the largest corporate member of the green business tourism scheme, to which Jamie McGrigor referred. That scheme helps businesses to reduce their impact on the environment against a range of energy, waste and water criteria. Fifty-eight SYHA hostels have been presented for, and achieved, awards.

As its name implies, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association has always encouraged young people to visit its hostels. School parties and youth groups from overseas, as well as from the UK, are regular visitors. I join with those who have supported the motion in congratulating the association on developing educational tours and encouraging young people to appreciate the Scottish countryside. A few hours ago, I received the association's proposal for improving its record in that area. Wisely, Kenny MacAskill stopped well short of endorsing that proposal. The initial assessment suggests that it would not be appropriate for us to support it, not just because of the provisional sum of £8 million that is attached to it, which is about a third more than the association's annual turnover, but because there are a wide range of commercial, local authority and voluntary sector providers in the outdoor education market. The objection applies also to the VAT argument. It is difficult to see the justification for funding one provider rather than another. Authorities and schools must be free to choose where they want to go for a residential experience in the outdoor sector.

Fergus Ewing: We subscribe to the idea that schools should be free to determine which hostel—whether an SYHA hostel or one in the independent sector—provides it with accommodation, but the point is whether the Executive will consider making any additional commitment to achieve the aim, which I described, of allowing more children to visit the countryside and stay in a hostel. In particular, I refer to children who, because of geography or local factors, are

excluded from such an experience at present.

Allan Wilson: I share that worthwhile aim. Many authorities encourage schools to provide some form of outdoor activity, but decisions on whether to do so and on the nature of any trips are properly a matter for the schools concerned. I do not think that Fergus Ewing expects me to comment on the detail of a proposal that we received only a few hours ago, particularly given the resource implications that I mentioned, but I undertake to examine it seriously and respond in detail in due course.

The motion correctly draws attention to the difficulties that the association is experiencing as a result of the foot-and-mouth outbreak. I share Fergus Ewing's sentiments on this matter. The association has been particularly badly hit as most of its hostels are in country areas. In the immediate aftermath of the start of the outbreak, local authorities adopted an extremely precautionary approach to access, but we have moved on. Much of Scotland is designated a provisionally disease-free area, where the risk of transmission of the disease is much lower. Because of that lower risk, livestock movement restrictions in the area have been eased, to the significant benefit of farmers and crofters.

The restrictions on access in the provisionally disease-free area should be seen in the same light and there should be a greater presumption in favour of public access. I regret the fact that some landowners, farmers and crofters remain very precautionary in their approach. To be frank, it is unacceptable that some refuse to co-operate with local authorities in removing unofficial signs that say that the countryside is closed. The persistence of such signs undermines the formal risk assessment that was put in place to protect farmers.

Mr McGrigor: While I agree with the minister that Scotland should be promoted as being open for business, it would have helped if the Scottish Executive or its rural affairs department had sent letters to farmers and landowners to tell them that it is now safe for them to remove their signs. Initially, the only letters that farmers and landowners received told them that they could put up signs on their own land at their own expense, if they so wished. They have received nothing in writing to tell them that it is safe to remove them.

Allan Wilson: The Executive has made a succession of statements asking farmers to do just that. Not for the first time, I ask individuals to consider the wider economic effect, not only in their own area but throughout Scotland. They should remove those unofficial signs now.

I understand that the SYHA is not waiting for others to come to its assistance and that it is

preparing a marketing and recovery plan, which it will discuss with visitscotland. It is also to introduce free student membership for 2001, which will encourage more young people to go hostelling, not only this year but in future.

The SYHA has served the interests of Scotland's tourism industry well over the past 70 years. I am sure that it will continue to do so over the next 70 years and beyond. I join all my colleagues in the chamber in wishing the association well in future.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

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Wednesday 16 May 2001

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