

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009 4th June

**A Day of Decision
for the Nation
and for the
European Union**

***INFORMATION FOR CHRISTIANS
CONCERNING THE ELECTIONS
FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT***

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A Maranatha Briefing

I. Facts

DATE

On Thursday, 4th June 2009 the United Kingdom will be electing its representatives to the European Parliament.

NUMBERS AND TERM OF OFFICE

The United Kingdom will have 78 Euro MPs out of a total of 785 in the European Parliament.

The members will be elected for a period of five years.

SIZE

The European Parliament represents nearly 500 million citizens in 27 member states and the European Union budget is currently about £120billion.

LOCATION

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) meet alternately in Brussels and Strasbourg.

HOW THE EU WORKS

The European Union (EU) is based on 27 European Nations as member states. The member states have given up some (critics would say too much) of their sovereignty to a supranational institution, the EU. This pooling of sovereignty means that the individual states give up some of their decision-making powers to shared institutions within the EU so that decisions can be made at EU level rather than national level. The Bureau which manages the European Parliament's activities comprises the President and 14 Vice-Presidents elected for a two-and-a-half year period. The conference of Presidents comprises the President of the European Parliament and the Chairmen of the Political Groups and draws up the Parliamentary agenda.

There are three main decision-making institutions within the EU, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. (For more information see section 3)

THE POWERS

The European Parliament has essentially three main roles:

1. It passes European laws, a power which is shared with the Council of Ministers in many areas.
2. It adopts the budget of the EU, again shared with the Council of Ministers.
3. It has the power to approve appointments of the 27 European Commissioners and it operates 20 specialist committees.

EUROPEAN LAW

The European Commission can propose new legislation which has to be passed by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The main form of EU laws are directives and regulations, the latter being directly applicable throughout the EU without this requiring approval by the member state.

REPRESENTATION

National representatives in the European Parliament are as follows:

Austria 18, Belgium 24, Bulgaria 18, Cyprus 6, Czech Republic 24, Denmark 14, Estonia 6, Finland 14, France 78, Germany 99, Greece 24, Hungary 24 Ireland 13, Italy 78, Latvia 9, Lithuania 13, Luxembourg 6, Malta 5, Netherlands 27, Poland 54, Portugal 24, Romania 35, Slovakia 14, Slovenia 7, Spain 54, Sweden 19, United Kingdom 78.

PARTY GROUPS

There are a number of broad political groupings within the Parliament, including Socialists, Liberals, Conservatives, Greens, Independence/Democracy and non-attached Members.

ELECTION SYSTEM

Unlike the British 'first past the post' system, the elections to the European Parliament (EP) are based on proportional representation. This means that even parties who only achieve a small percentage of the vote can gain seats in the EP. There are particular concerns that a low turnout would lead to significant gains for extreme parties such as far-right parties. The parties operate a list system, so the voter cannot vote for an individual candidate but only for a party.

EUROPE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The Christian roots of Europe go back to the first century AD and Christianity has shaped Europe over the centuries more than any other influence. However, Europe now has become what is probably the most secular continent on earth. Christians need to ask the question: *What is God's will for Europe and for the European Union?*

2. Prayers

FOR EUROPE

As we vote in the forthcoming election -

Sovereign Lord, shake your people out of their apathy and awaken us to our responsibility for Europe. Show us the urgency of the forthcoming election. As your people of old were ready to speak and live your truth, give us the same passion for your truth to be proclaimed in the councils of Europe and to be embodied in the legislation that governs the people of Europe. Give us a ready will to pursue your righteousness and a discerning mind to know when we have found it.

Give us wisdom as we meet and question the candidates and as we cast our votes. May those we elect be men and women of integrity and vision. We pray that as they are elected by the list system they will remain aware of their answerability to us and that together we shall know that we are answerable to you.

Breathe your life into the European Commission, the Parliament, its committees, the Council, the courts and all the administration. Blow away anything that is false, self-seeking or corrupt. May right judgements be made that will be honouring to you. Amen.

For the vision of peace and co-operation in Europe -

God, our Father, give us a true perspective of the European Union so that the original vision of nations at peace with one another may not be thrust aside by the desire for material prosperity at any price. We pray that we may not be a club for the rich but rather a source of hope for all the nations. We pray that we may not be inward-looking but may reach out in love and friendship to all the nations of the world. We thank you for the rich variety of the nations and regions of Europe and pray that the life and character of local communities will not be submerged into an amorphous whole but will contribute vigorously both to the decision-making and the cultural tapestry of the whole Union. Give to us the diversity in unity that you alone make possible. Amen.

For the efficient administration of the European Union -

We pray that all the administration of the Union may be carried out responsibly as all who hold office recognise that they are servants and entrusted with its wellbeing.

We pray for integrity in the handling of finances, and that the European Commission may be transparently honest in its undertakings, open to the scrutiny of the European Parliament. We pray that the budget committee will exercise good stewardship and wisdom in the allocation of resources.

We pray for decision-making that affects the lives of all of us. May personal responsibility and freedom not be further eroded. We pray that the Christian voice will not be muted but that we shall have the freedom of speech and action to proclaim and practise the Christian faith. We lift before you those who have been discriminated against because of their faith.

We ask your protection for the value and dignity of human life from those forces of destruction that would weaken laws on abortion, euthanasia, pornography and the disposal of nuclear waste. May your voice be heard in the committees responsible for the environment, public health and consumer protection. We pray for right relationships between all the instruments of government. Amen.

Almighty God, loving Father we acknowledge that Europe belongs to you, not to us or to any committee. May your Name be honoured in the legislation that is enacted and in all the administration of the Union. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THE PEOPLE OF EUROPE

We give thanks for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our rich inheritance in the faith in Europe:

For the value and dignity brought to men and women made in the image of God;

For the shaping of our laws on the foundation of God's commandments;

For the men and women of faith who spoke the truth of the Gospel and refused any compromise with evil;

For the forming of our culture; the abundance of music & art, of literature & learning, celebrating the unmerited goodness of God towards us;

For the centuries during which the Christian faith has been the foundation of this continent;

For the vision of unity, peace and justice given under the equitable rule of God.

We repent of our apathy and our rejection of God's Holy Way in Europe:

In pride and arrogance we have gone our own way, believing we were answerable to no one but ourselves.

We have made ourselves rich through greed, as other parts of the world grew poor.

We have abused our power, inflicting suffering on the weak.

We have made this continent hideous with the violence of war. The cries of those torn from their homes, torn from their families, torn apart in body, mind and soul witness against us.

We have given glory to ourselves and to the works of our hands and have refused to honour and praise our creator.

We have neglected to love our neighbour, pursuing instead our own ends and replacing righteousness with corruption.

We pray that God will forgive us and grant us a new beginning in Europe. We pray for:

A new desire for right relationships with our environment, our neighbours and our God.

A new awareness of our responsibility for the right ordering of Europe.

A new sense of answerability in the administration of Europe.

A new search for integrity in those we elect as leaders.

A new spirit of co-operation between the nations of Europe.

A new concern for love & truth, for the justice that reflects God's justice, for the honouring of God's laws & the obedience that brings freedom.

Living God you have given us blessing beyond measure in the gift of your Son Jesus Christ. Forgive us that we have so readily spurned your love and turned from your ways. Give to us a new desire to serve you with all our heart and mind and strength, in the councils of Europe and in the living of our daily lives, to your honour and glory. Amen

3. Background

THE INSTITUTIONS

The **European Commission** is essentially the “executive” of the EU. It currently has 27 Commissioners (one for each member state) who are appointed by national governments. The Commission is the only body within the EU that can propose legislation (the European Parliament cannot propose legislation). The Commission could be described as the “government” of the EU.

The **European Parliament** is directly elected by the people of Europe. It currently has 785 MEPs who are elected every 5 years. Sessions take place alternating between Brussels and Strasbourg.

The **Council of the European Union** is the principal decision-making body within the EU. It is informally called the Council of Ministers or Consilium (Latin for “council”). It consists of Government ministers of the 27 states. The composition varies, depending on the topic discussed. Even though the Council consists of Government ministers, it has significant legislative powers within the EU. The Presidency of the Council rotates every 6 months between the heads of the member states.

The **European Court of Justice** (ECJ) is the highest court in the EU. It is based in Luxembourg. It ensures that EU legislation is applied uniformly across the EU. The ECJ has ruled that EU law takes precedence over national law.

The **European Central Bank** (ECB) was established in 1998 and has its seat in Frankfurt. It is responsible for the monetary policy of the countries that are part of the Euro-zone. Currently, 16 EU countries have adopted the Euro. The ECB is in principle independent from political interference and is one of the most powerful central banks worldwide.

The **Council of Europe** is an institution not directly connected with the European Union. Its seat is in Strasbourg. It was founded in 1949. It has a particular emphasis on the protection of human rights, democracy and cultural co-operation. Its membership is far wider than that of the EU: it currently has 47 member states, including countries that are not part of the EU such as Switzerland, Norway, but also Russia, Ukraine, and others. At the heart of the Council of Europe lies the *European Convention on Human Rights* and the *European Court of Human Rights* (also based in Strasbourg) through which the convention is enforced. The rulings of the European Court of Human Rights can override those of national legal authorities.

THE HISTORY

Following the devastation of the Second World War, it was recognised that there would be the need to create structures within Europe that would prevent another war. The first such institution was the **European Coal and Steel Community** (ECSC) which was first suggested by French foreign minister Robert Schuman. In 1951, the Treaty of Paris was signed by 6 nations, France, Germany, Italy and the three Benelux states, to establish the ECSC, creating a common market for coal and steel between them.

The **European Economic Community** (EEC, also known as the “Common Market”) was an international organisation created by the 1957 Treaties of Rome signed by Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The purpose of this treaty was to bring about economic integration between the signatory states. The EEC established a common price level for agricultural products and removed some tariffs on trade between member nations.

The Treaty of Maastricht, which came into effect in 1993, **formally established the EU**. Signed by 12 countries, it changed the name of the European Economic Community to “*the European Community*”. It also introduced new forms of co-operation between the Member State governments - for example on defence, and in the area of justice and home affairs. By adding this inter-governmental co-operation to the existing Community system, the Maastricht Treaty created a new structure with three “pillars” which is political as well as, economic. The three pillars refer to the Community pillar, which itself is based on the three Communities: (the European Community, the European Atomic Energy Community and the former European Coal and Steel Community); the second pillar, which is devoted to the common foreign and security policy; and the third pillar devoted to police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters. The European Union then developed further through a series of treaties.

The Treaty of Nice, was signed in 2001. It dealt mostly with reforming the institutions so that the Union could function efficiently after its enlargement to 25 member states. The Treaty of Nice, the former Treaty of the EU and the Treaty of the EC have been merged into one consolidated version.

A **Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe** was adopted by the Heads of States in 2004 but was never ratified, after being rejected in referendums in the Netherlands and France in 2005.

4. Structure

These are the Parliamentary Committees of the EU:

- **Foreign Affairs, with Subcommittees Human Rights and Security & Defence**
Foreign, security and defence policies, the political aspects of relations with, and human rights in, third world countries, and future enlargement of the Union.
 - **Agriculture and Rural Development**
The Common Agricultural Policy and forestry, rural development, animal health, foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials.
 - **Budgets**
The annual budget of the European Community (including the Parliament), the financial framework and resources of the Community, financial implications of EU legislation, transfers between different categories of expenditure.
 - **Economic and Monetary Affairs**
Internal market legislation, monetary policy (including balance of payments), capital movements, economic and monetary union and taxation, industrial policy, customs and quotas within intra-EC trade, competition policy, state aids, technical standards, steel industry.
 - **Industry, Research, and Energy**
Energy supplies, the Joint Research Centre, Research and Development programmes, biotechnology, information technology, patents.
 - **International Trade**
Trade relations with third world countries and international organisations, trade agreements, economic aspects of the European Economic Area.
 - **Legal Affairs**
European Union legislation and the creation of a European legal area, citizens' rights, co-ordination of national legislation including freedom to provide services and company law.
 - **Employment and Social Affairs**
Employment policy including vocational training and social security questions, the European Social Fund, free movement, housing, equal pay, migrant workers, health and safety at work.
 - **Regional Development**
Regional policy and the Regional Fund, transfrontier co-operation.
 - **Transport and Tourism**
A common transport policy including air, sea and road transport and ports, a European transport network, postal communications and tourism.
 - **Environment, Public Health and Food Safety**
Environmental policy, air and water pollution, dangerous substances (including waste), noise levels, the law of the sea, consumer protection and public health (including food legislation), pharmaceutical products, medical research cosmetics and civil defence.
 - **Culture and Education**
Youth exchanges, culture, education (including recognition of qualifications), information, the media, sport and leisure.
 - **Development**
Aid policy (including food aid), the North/South dialogue, generalised system of trade preferences, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (Lome) Aid Convention.
 - **Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs**
Human rights in the Union, civil liberties, free movement, asylum, racism, immigration, drug trafficking, fraud, customs, police and judicial co-operation, Europol.
 - **Constitutional Affairs**
European integration, political union, institutional implications of European Union legislation, a uniform electoral system and the seat of the Institutions.
 - **Budgetary Control**
Investigation of fraud and other irregularities, ensuring that the Community's money is properly spent.
 - **Fisheries**
Supervising the Common Fisheries Policy, International Fisheries agreements.
 - **Internal Market and Consumer Protection**
Free trade within the Common Market and related issues, protection of consumers .
 - **Women's Rights and Gender Equality**
Monitoring and suggesting improvements concerning equality legislation, employment and training policy for women, reconciling work with family life and migrant women; issues of discrimination on the basis of Gender and sexual orientation.
 - **Petitions**
The reception and analysis of petitions, which it is the right of all Union citizens to submit to the Parliament.
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5. Issues

WHAT KIND OF EUROPE?

There has been a move from the Common Market to the European Community to the European Union with more centralised power and the real dangers of an inefficient bureaucracy. For most people the European Union is remote and impersonal. We need to decide whether we wish to retain our national sovereignty, with close co-operation with European countries, or alternatively to be a part of a highly centralised and integrated European state. Already most of the legislation which has been passed in Britain in recent years emanates from European Union rather than our own national Parliament. The proposal that the preamble of the abandoned European Constitution should contain no reference to God at all is one example of the powerful influence of secularism within the EU. Are we as Christians prepared to stand up for Christian values within Europe?

THE LISBON TREATY

The **Treaty of Lisbon** was signed on 13 December 2007. It had to be ratified by all 27 Member States before it could enter into force, which was expected to be before the imminent European Parliament elections in June. **Even though a referendum was promised to the British people, this did not happen and Britain has now ratified the Lisbon Treaty.** However, its future is in doubt following its rejection in the Irish referendum in June 2008. It is also subject to a Constitutional Challenge in Germany.

Those who favour the Lisbon Treaty state that it would lead to:

A more democratic Europe - This would be achieved through a strengthened role for the European and National Parliaments, a stronger voice for Citizens and the explicit possibility for a Member state to withdraw from the European Union.

A more efficient Europe - This would be achieved through more efficient decision-making, for example qualified majority voting, the creation of a President of the European Council, and a smaller European Commission.

Strengthening of rights and values, freedom solidarity and security within Europe - This would be achieved through implementing the Charter of Fundamental Rights into European primary law, thereby making the Charter of Fundamental Rights legally binding, through strengthening the political, economic, social freedoms of citizens; and through increasing security.

Strengthening the position of Europe as an actor on the world stage through creating a “High Representative” for foreign and defence policies, and a European Foreign Service; developing and progressing a united foreign and defence policy across the EU; and creating a single legal personality for the EU.

Those who oppose the Lisbon Treaty point out that this Treaty is the European Constitution in all but name as more than 90% of the text of the Lisbon treaty is the same as the text of the “abandoned” constitution. The actual Treaty is not an easily accessible document; the consolidated version contains nearly 400 pages. **There are concerns that the Lisbon Treaty will go further in the direction of creating a European Superstate, with a European President, Foreign and Defence minister, budget, taxation, army and Diplomatic Service. This leads to the abandonment of British Embassies abroad, which would be replaced by “EU embassies”.** Critics are concerned that it would create a much more powerful European government than the current European Commission. The Lisbon Treaty is “self-amending”, which means that laws affecting everyone in Europe can be changed in the future by the EU or the EU’s heads of states without approval by member states. Critics point out that the proposals would essentially give powers to the new European Government to change national laws in all areas without approval of the nation concerned. There are concerns that this would include national laws or policies affecting very sensitive areas such as:

- **The definition of citizenship:** the creation of a European Union (EU) citizenship would supersede national citizenships. It would imply an obedience to EU’s laws and institutions *above* obedience to national laws and institutions.
 - **Defence and security,** as there are plans to create a **European army** and further develop the common **European intelligence service,** Sirene.
 - **Foreign policy:** under the Treaty of Lisbon international agreements can be concluded by majority decisions. The EU agreements will be binding on a member state, even if their representatives voted against the contents of an agreement.
 - **Economic and fiscal policy,** with plans to create a unified **European budget** and **European taxation,** which would supersede both national budgets and taxation,
 - **The scope of freedoms** enjoyed by citizens including the **definition of human rights,** where European – rather than national – legislation would stipulate the rights and freedoms enjoyed by citizens.
 - The introduction of a **European Penal Code** a **European Public Prosecutor** and **European arrest warrant.** A European Arrest Warrant could force a country to extradite one of their citizens to another country. There already is a joint **European police force,** Europol, based in The Hague.
 - The **European Court of Justice (ECJ),** which would become Europe’s “Supreme Court”: Should there be conflict between the national Constitution and the EU Constitution, the Union Constitution will - according to the ECJ – have primacy.
 - **Legislation,** where **EU laws would have primacy over national laws.** National Parliaments have their powers progressively further reduced to rubber-stamping laws that originate from the EU. Already, the majority (80% or more) of “national” laws passed by national parliaments originate from the EU.
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6. Action

- **IMMEDIATELY** ask your candidates where they stand on key issues such as abortion, pornography, overseas aid, defence of marriage and the family, protection of children, corruption and inefficiency in the Commission and religious freedom. *You can get their telephone numbers from their election material. Alternatively the following offices can help:* Conservative – 020 7222 9000, Labour – 08705 900200, Liberal Democrats – 020 7222 7999, Christian Peoples Alliance - 0845 4565 478; UK Independence Party - 01524 387690, Libertas - 0207 824 5270;
- **IMMEDIATELY** approach your Church Leaders, Bishops, District Chairmen, Moderators. Ask them to meet the Euro Candidates in your area. Urge them to meet the newly elected MEPs as soon as possible.
- **IMMEDIATELY** arrange meeting with local churches to meet and question candidates.
- **ON SUNDAY 31ST MAY** make sure that prayers for the European Elections are said in YOUR Church.
- **AFTER THE ELECTION (7TH JUNE)** ensure that prayers are said in your church for the newly elected MEPs.
- **AFTER THE ELECTION** write to the successful candidates, to congratulate them. Tell them you will be praying for them. Make it clear to them that you will be following their actions carefully. Perhaps invite them to meet you in your church or at your home.
- **IN FUTURE** obtain information about the European Union to pass to members of your Church and Fellowship. Encourage prayerful consideration of what Britain's role should be in Europe. Literature is available free of charge from the UK Office of the European Parliament, 2 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AA. Tel: 020 7227 4300 Fax: 020 7227 4302.

A CHALLENGE – USE YOUR RIGHTS!

Christians should be fully aware that together with all European Union citizens we have the right to directly influence European affairs. We are entitled to write to and petition directly the President of the European Parliament: Postal address GOL03A012, L-2929 Luxembourg or through the website www.europarl.europa.eu with any request or complaint for consideration.

A petition may relate to a matter of general concern or an individual complaint. Alternatively, it may take the form of a request for Parliament to take a particular stance on an area of public interest. Depending on the circumstances your petition may be:

- Forwarded to the European Commission (which obtains/assembles the relevant information and sends it to the Committee on Petitions).
- Forwarded by the President of the European Parliament to the appropriate national authorities.
- Made the subject of a parliamentary report which is submitted to Parliament in plenary session.
- Forwarded to the Council of Ministers and/or the European Commission, accompanied by an opinion of the Committee on Petitions.

NOTE:

APATHY AND INACTION

- The overwhelming majority of people in the United Kingdom did not use their vote in the last European Election. **Only 38.5% voted.** (There is a real danger of extremists such as the racist BNP gaining ground). It is important that all of us, ESPECIALLY CHRISTIANS, recognise the importance of what is happening in the European Union.

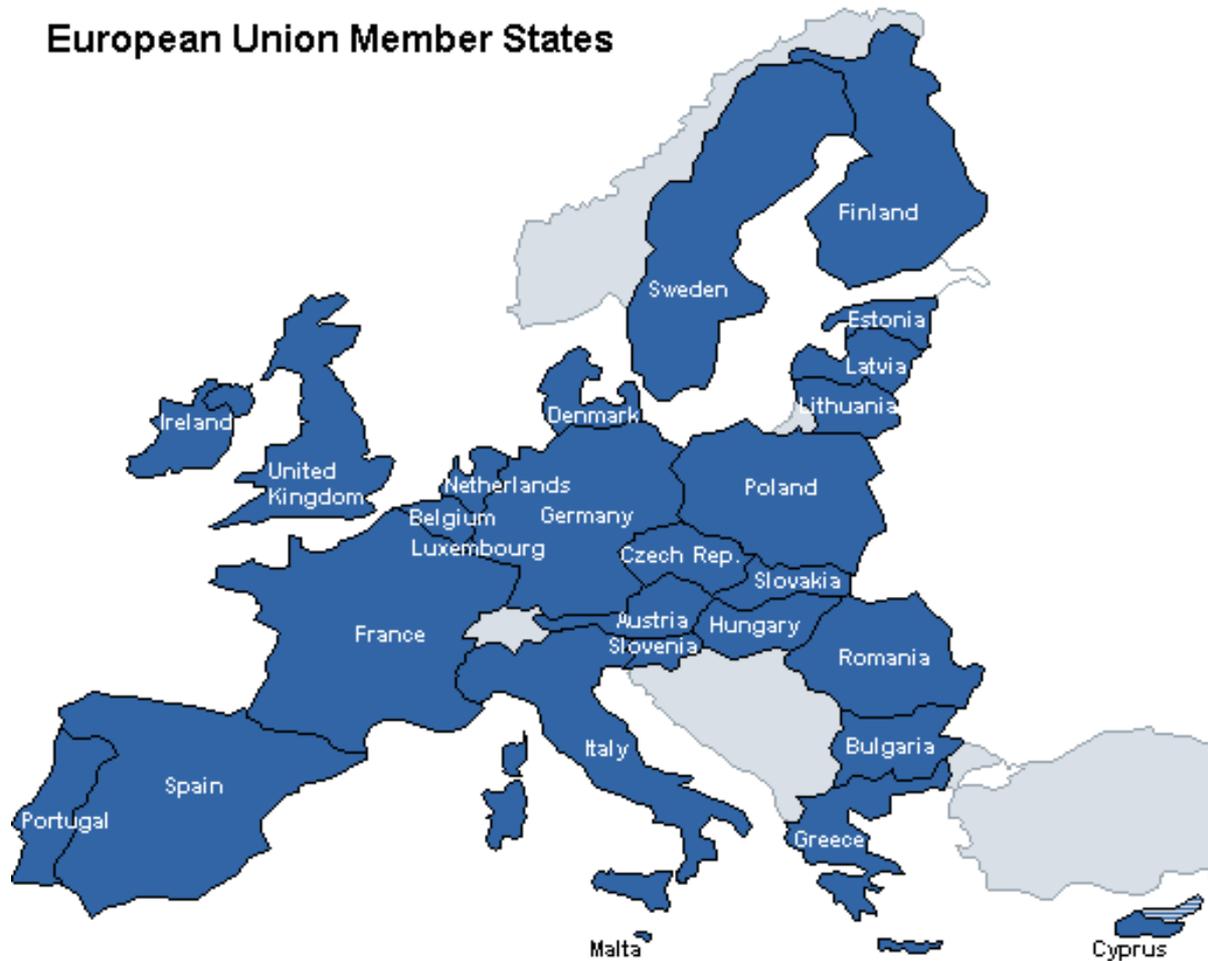
INEFFICIENCY

- For 14 consecutive years the European Union **has failed to have its accounts approved.** As Christians we have a duty to ensure public resources are being properly managed. The present situation is intolerable: challenge your candidates.

CORRUPTION

- There has been widespread public alarm at the **excessive** expenses of Members of the European Parliament and there are now immediate demands for radical change. Challenge your candidates.
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European Union Member States



***“Finally.....
Whatever is true
Whatever is honourable
Whatever is just
Whatever is pure
Whatever is lovely
Whatever is gracious,
If there is any excellence,
If there is anything
Worthy of praise,
Think about these things”
(Philippians 4.v8)***

The Maranatha Community is a Christian movement with many thousands of members throughout the country active in all the main churches. Its membership includes a substantial number of people involved in work for the community in both professional and voluntary capacities. Since its formation 28 years ago, it has been deeply involved in a broad range of relief work in many countries and in the care of people from other countries resident in the United Kingdom who are in need.

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