

FMA activities

VISIT UNDER EU PRESIDENCY

VISIT TO THE NETHERLANDS

Back in the 1994-9 mandate I was privileged to be an MEP and represent the far south west of the UK. I remember well that my electors assumed I was an expert on every aspect of life in the other member states – their political systems, health services, education, everything. Impossible of course. Just understanding all those aspects of your own country is difficult enough.

So our visit to the Netherlands, towards the end of its presidency of the EU, with fellow former members was a great refresher as to how politics, parliament (known as the States-General) and power in Holland works. It was also a great bonus to meet with Dutch former colleagues from the European Parliament that I had not seen for many years. They hosted us magnificently. We learnt about a successful Dutch presidency, if hugely distracted by the UK's Brexit negotiations.

Our visit to The Hague included the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the more difficult to understand Council of State. But we were in luck. Ready to explain the Council was one of its senior members, Jan Kees Wiebenga, a former MEP and colleague. We

learnt that the Council – nominally chaired by the monarch – has to be consulted before a bill is presented to Parliament. It doesn't vote politically but tests its administrative quality and any conflict with existing legislation. It is also the highest court of appeal in administrative matters.

Arriving at the Estates-General we were welcomed by the House of Representatives Deputy Speaker Mr Ton Elias. We then walked the short distance to the Senate where we were greeted by the President of the Senate, Ms Broekers-Knol. The Senate chamber was busy that day with a conference of senators and representatives of the wider Dutch nation from the Caribbean. It was a good reminder that the Kingdom of the Netherlands is not just an exclusively European affair, but incorporates the Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten. The Senate itself is elected indirectly through Dutch provincial governments.

Our plenary session between former colleagues and serving members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate was a highlight of the visit. We were joined by members from across the Dutch political spectrum. But first, former colleague Laurens-Jan Brinkhorst led an introductory session on the Netherlands and the EU. He made the case that Holland had never been strongly into political union, but far more concerned with economic and business links across Europe. The meeting inevitably wanted to understand the Brexit debate. Our former Conservative MEP colleague Anthony Simpson tried to reassure us that despite the tone of the debate

and opinion polls the 'bookies' were offering 5-1 odds on a 'remain' victory. The hope was that Brits would vote with the potential economic consequences in mind. Sadly, as we know, this has turned out not to be the case.

But there were many other issues debated – the importance of the Benelux grouping in recent times, the Dutch role in the EU both as founder member but also as largest of the smaller member states. We learnt that during the Dutch presidency the Estates General had stressed the important role of national parliaments holding a series of inter-parliamentary meetings to promote that agenda.

Congratulations to the FMA and our Dutch hosts for an excellent visit.

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Meeting at the Dutch Parliament



Visit to Eurojust

After two years the FMA visited again Eurojust in the Hague. The President of Eurojust, Michèle Coninx, welcomed the delegation and participated in a lively and fruitful debate on Judicial Cooperation and Coordination.

You can find more information about Eurojust on: www.eurojust.europa.eu

WEAPON OF PEACE

On the 28th of May, Former Member Association had the privilege to visit the Netherlands under the Dutch presidency. European Space and Technology Centre ESTEC was the first stop in the programme, and it was a great kick-off. We happened to visit at the same time, while Mrs. Bienkowska, Commissioner for Internal Market opened the high-level conference in The Hague on the Future Space Policies. The EU Space Policy communication is about to be released yet in 2016. At ESTEC we were given a short introduction on what ESTEC is doing, how is it funded, parties to it and the way it is organized. The intro was delivered by the Mr. Franco Ongaro, Head of ESTEC since 1st of April 2011, followed by the tour guided by Mr. Juan de Dalmau, Head of ESTEC Communication Office. We had a joy to visit the real size European Space Station and see many installations to help our understanding.

ESTEC is the largest space facility in Europe belonging to the European Space Agency (ESA) which has, over two thousand employees, eight locations, eighty satellites and

5,2-billion-euro turnover. ESA is an intergovernmental organization, well-integrated in the world's space community. From the 6th financial framework programme ESA implements European Union space programmes namely Galileo and Copernicus. The former is a global navigation system, while the latter is an Earth observation programme. The budget in the 8th financial framework is allocating over seven billion euro to both programmes. Beside the European Union programmes, ESTEC has several projects like the discovery of the universe, establishment of the Moon Village. ESA is the most prominent designers for launchers, which they also test at ESTEC. In addition, ESA works a lot on the development of global space law with national, European, transnational actors. ESTEC is key for promoting knowledge and providing opportunities for young scientist over the continent.

The European Space Programme is clearly not about the cost, but investment. Space sector including space industry and space services are worth 320 billion euro and employ

over 500 000 people, growing double digit each year. Start up and spin off companies are born, new knowledge is created and filtering to other traditional sectors. Just remember that the first solar panel had to be developed for space program to provide energy for flying objects fifty years ago.

Space industry is an enabler for many growth sectors, securing global competitiveness for Europe. Navigation system is necessary for mobility, telecommunication, internet of things especially digitalization of forestry and agriculture. The Earth Observation is critical to achieve COP21 targets and UN sustainable development goals. Moreover, it's a very effective technology for observing and forecasting natural disasters like floods or earthquakes etc. Furthermore, it will be a complementary to telecommunication technologies for securing internet connection anywhere, anytime even when flying. The actual legislation on privacy does not allow it, but it could play a role in effective border controls and rescuing refugees in the Mediterranean.

Space is a weapon of peace. Nations and regions who are otherwise in conflict are working together for the common future. When contemporary legislators will decide on future policies they should remember the long term opportunities besides the daily short term crisis management, and vote the necessary funds to invent the future of Europe.

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Visit to ESTEC