MEMO+

Minority Ethnic Matters Overview+

MEMO+ is an occasional series of briefing papers on topics of interest to minority ethnic communities in Scotland.
It is produced by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities in partnership with the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland, and is supported by the Scottish Government.

Briefing:
Voting in the 2009 European Parliament Election

The European Parliament election will take place on 4 June 2009, and it is important that as many people as possible vote to ensure that the views of Scottish people are represented in Europe. Please circulate this issue of MEMO+ among your membership and encourage everyone to vote!

The European Parliament consists of 736 MEPs, of whom 72 come from the UK. The UK is divided into twelve electoral regions each of which elects between 3 and 10 MEPs. The whole of Scotland is a single electoral region, and will elect 6 MEPs (one fewer than at the last European Parliament election) by a system of proportional representation.

72 candidates are standing in Scotland representing the following parties:

Scottish National Party	Labour Party
Conservative Party	Liberal Democrat Party
British National Party	Scottish Green Party
Scottish Socialist Party	No2Eu: Yes to Democracy
Socialist Labour Party	United Kingdom Independence Party
Jury Team	Christian Party "Proclaiming Christ's Lordship"

There is also one independent candidate.

If your name is on the Electoral Register you will automatically receive a polling card and be able to vote. If you are unable to go to the polling station you can still vote by post or you can name another person to vote on your behalf at the polling station (voting by proxy). The deadline for registration is 19th May, so if you have not yet received a polling card, or if you would like to register for a postal or proxy vote, see About My Vote or contact your local Electoral Registration Officer as soon as possible.

Citizens of other European countries living in the UK may vote here if they are listed in the Electoral Register. However, with the exception citizens of Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus, they must also complete a European Parliament voter registration form to confirm that they will vote only in the UK and not in their home country.

Important dates for the European Parliament election

19 May 2009   Deadline for: a) registering to vote
                                              b) applying for a new postal vote
                                              c) changing or cancelling an existing postal or proxy vote
                                              d) returning a European Parliament voter registration form

27 May 2009   Deadline for applying for a new proxy vote.
                      Note: *if you are prevented from voting by a medical emergency you may apply for a proxy vote any time until 5pm on polling day.*

4 June 2009   Polling day – vote between 7am and 10pm

How to vote

The ballot paper will list the political parties in alphabetical order of party name followed by the independent candidate. The candidates standing for each party will be listed under the relevant heading. However, voters can only choose the party they prefer; they do not have any influence over which candidates will occupy any seats won by that party.

Vote by putting <u>one</u> **X** beside the political party <u>or</u> independent candidate that you want to support.

How your vote counts

The European Parliament election uses a party list system similar, but not identical to that used to elect Regional MSPs to the Scottish Parliament. It is different from the systems used in Westminster General Elections and Scottish local Council elections.

The form of proportional representation (known as the **d'Hondt** system) used in the European Parliament election aims to equalise as nearly as possible the number of votes needed by each candidate in order to be elected. This is done by allocating a proportion of the party's votes to those of its candidates who have already been elected, and then considering which party has the largest remaining number of unallocated votes.

The six Scottish seats are allocated one by one in six separate rounds of counting:

1)   First all votes are counted, and the party with the highest number wins the first seat.

2)   In the second round, the total number of votes originally received by the party that won the first seat is divided by 2. Half of their votes are allocated to the seat already won, and the other half remain in the contest. The second seat is won by the party that now has the largest number of the votes still in contention.

3) In each subsequent round, the total number of votes originally received by each party is divided by the number of seats it has already won plus 1 (so if it has one seat then its number of votes is halved; if it has won two seats, then the number of votes it originally received is divided by 3, and so on), and the next seat is won by the party that then has the highest number of remaining votes. This pattern is repeated for six rounds, until all of the available seats have been allocated.

4) Each political party fills the seats it has won with its candidates, in the order in which they were listed on the ballot paper. Voters cannot influence this order.

Illustration of the d'Hondt system:

In the following example, six parties (A to F) are competing for six seats:

Round	Party A	Party B	Party C	Party D	Party E	Party F
1	**3000**	2250	800	700	600	500
2	1500	**2250**	800	700	600	500
3	**1500**	1125	800	700	600	500
4	1000	**1125**	800	700	600	500
5	**1000**	750	800	700	600	500
6	750	750	**800**	700	600	500

- *A receives 3000 votes. This is more than any other party, so it wins the first seat.*
- *For the second round, half of the votes received by A are allocated to the seat it has already won, leaving it with 1500 "unused" votes. B now has the highest number of votes, so it wins a seat.*
- *In round 3, half of the original number of both A's and B's votes are disregarded as they have both already won a seat. Even so, A still has the highest number of unallocated votes, so it wins a second seat.*
- *For round 4, A's total vote is divided by 3 (one more than the number of seats it has already won). B again has the highest number of unallocated votes, so it wins the fourth seat.*
- *B's votes now also have to be divided by 3, leaving A with the largest number of unallocated votes, so the fifth round is again won by A.*
- *Since this is A's third seat, its original number of votes is divided by 4, and it enters the final round with 750 votes. C now has the largest remaining number of votes, and so wins the sixth round.*
- *So in total, Party A won 3 seats, Party B won 2 seats, and Party C won 1 seat. Parties D, E, and F did not win any seats.*

Note that because the votes received by the largest parties are increasingly disregarded in the later rounds, it is possible for parties with a small share of the vote to win seats disproportionately in the final stages. Since, in this example, there are 6 available seats, each elected member should ideally be supported by 1/6 (17%) of voters, but Party C wins a seat with only 10% of the vote. It is therefore clear that this voting system can result in small (and sometimes extremist) parties winning more influence than their support warrants. This is more likely if there is a low turn-out.

Election Results

Ballot papers can be opened and the count can begin immediately after polling stations close at 10pm but Returning Officers may choose to delay starting the count until the following day, especially where they will in any case have to wait for ballot boxes from rural polling stations, so it is not certain how early the results will be announced. The full results for the European Parliament will not be available until 7 June.

Useful Websites

- **Election information from the European Parliament**
  http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2009/default.htm?language=en

- **List of European Parliament candidates in Scotland**
  http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/internet/Attachments/Internet/Council/Elections/European_elections/NoP_final.pdf

- **About My Vote**
  http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/

- **The Electoral Commission**
  http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/

Please circulate this issue of MEMO+ among your membership and encourage people to register and to vote in the elections on 4 June!

The **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)** is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. It advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and also works in partnership with other organisations to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. (Scottish Charity SC029438)
http://www.scojec.org/

BEMIS (the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland) is the umbrella body for ethnic minority organisations in Scotland. It aims to strengthen the capacity of the ethnic minority voluntary sector; raise the profile and coordinate the voice of this sector; and take a lead on policy issues to ensure that issues of concern are raised with government and other relevant bodies.
http://www.bemis.org.uk/index.html

The **Scottish Government** is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland. **One Scotland** is the Scottish Government campaign designed to tackle racism. It aims to raise awareness of racist attitudes, highlight its negative impact and recognise the valuable contributions that other cultures have made to our society – and make Scotland no place for racism.
http://www.scotlandagainstracism.com/