



Catherine Bearder on creating the new programme for ALDE following the European elections

The challenge of tackling climate change, protecting biodiversity and our natural resources has become even harder after May's European Elections which swept a tide of anti-European and populist parties into the Parliament.

ALDE, the Liberal group in the European Parliament with whom the Liberal Democrats sit, took a big hit. Not only have we lost all of my hardworking British Lib Dem colleagues, the German FDP was cut from 12 MEPs to 3.

But that's not to say it was all bad news. Liberals topped the polls in the Netherlands, and new liberal parties from Spain, Portugal, Austria and the Czech Republic have boosted our numbers making ALDE the fourth largest group. I now sit in the Parliament with 67 fellow liberal MEPs from 20 other EU member states.

We are more determined than ever before to deliver liberal policies in the EU that work for people across Europe and influence the way we tackle the big questions of our time.

As the EU is made up of 28 countries, 23 languages and a huge variety of cultures, European politics is all about compromise, alliance-building and detailed negotiation. The centre-right EPP and the centre-left Socialists (the group with which British Labour sits) need the support of liberal MEPs in order to withstand the now nearly 25% of MEPs from anti-European parties and get major policies through. We have therefore agreed to form a working coalition to support the big political decisions, putting ALDE in a strong position to help shape the policy agenda over the next five years.

This is not to ignore the protest votes from across Europe, indeed we must heed these voices. But we believe across the political divide in

the Parliament that we are stronger together, building a Union fit for the 21st Century that can continue to deliver peace, opportunity and protection for all our citizens in an ordered and fair market place.

ALDE will be fighting to sort out the Eurozone imbalances, stimulate economic growth and create sustainable jobs. We will also continue to champion fundamental rights and civil liberties. My personal priority on the Environment Committee however will be to stress the importance of biodiversity and the need to protect our limited natural resources within the bigger picture of climate change, population growth and ageing.

Meanwhile our domestic coalition partners have chosen some surprising partners to join their political group. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) are now the third largest group in the European Parliament, but at what cost? Will

they really be able to hold it together to deliver the programme of reform Cameron promised by wooing far-right and anti-European parties such as the Finns Party and the Danish People's Party?

And UKIP are not very different, they are the largest part of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group who have assembled a number of dubious groups under their umbrella, including the comedian Beppe Grillo's group from Italy, a defector from the French National Front (yes already!) and the far-right Swedish Democrats.

What Tories and UKIP fail to understand is the distinction between Westminster and European politics. In Brussels, tribalism, grandstanding and one-upmanship that may give a short-term boost to the polls ends up damaging relationships with allies. This then damages the UK's standing in the long term.

Alliance building

European politics is all about listening and working through negotiations to achieve the best outcomes. With 751 MEPs from 28 EU countries and various different political groups this takes time,

“In Brussels, tribalism, grandstanding and one-upmanship that may give a short-term boost to the polls ends up damaging relationships with allies.”

patience and a will to compromise. It is also what multinational democracy is all about. In order to be a key player in Europe's complex decision-making process, you need to make friends and influence people.

Alliance-building starts in our own political groups and as the Liberal Democrats member I sit with like-minded liberal parties from across the EU. This does not mean that we always agree with one another. Indeed, as with our own party one of the strengths of the Liberal group is

our willingness to have full and frank debates about the merits of different policies and approaches, from the environment to consumer protection and trade.

The environment committee

As a member of the Environment Committee, I am now part of a Liberal team with five other ALDE MEPs. Our Environment committee team coordinator is Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy from the Dutch D66, who as a strong negotiator and experienced MEP will provide a clear

on how many MEPs they have, who negotiates on behalf of their political group. This ensures that different political viewpoints are taken into account so that the final report has a good chance of securing an overall majority in the Parliament.

I will take the lead for the ALDE group on issues of biodiversity as well as new EU limits on air pollution. It will be my job to meet and be briefed with different stakeholders, for example NGOs and businesses, report back to the ALDE group about the negotiating process



political steer throughout the range of issues we will have to deal with over the coming months and years. It also helps that he's got similar views to me on the importance of protecting biodiversity and improving resource efficiency.

We now need to choose leads on the various legislative files that will be discussed in the Committee in the coming months. The MEP who leads a specific piece of legislation on behalf of a Committee is called a "rapporteur". This MEP steers the law through the Parliament and is the lead negotiator with national ministers when it comes to finding a final compromise with the Council. Each political group is also allocated a specific number of "shadow rapporteurs," depending

and suggest how we should vote on the various amendments being put forward.

My 'lost' Lib Dem MEP colleagues, who had an outstanding track-record on the environment, will be particularly missed within the ALDE group when it comes to debates on green issues. A number of MEPs from the more economic-liberal wing seem to think that the need to recover from the economic crisis is all important and my concern is we might ignore the looming environmental crisis. My job will be to convince them that fighting climate change and using our resources more efficiently not only makes ecological sense, it makes economic sense too.



It's my ambition to follow in the footsteps of former Lib Dem MEP and ALDE coordinator for the Environment Committee Chris Davies, who was known throughout the Parliament for his ability to build alliances and deliver real change. It was Chris who led on reform of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy by setting up the cross-party Fish for the Future group. His conviction, tenacity and ability to get people on-board helped deliver reforms that will prevent overfishing and the wasteful discarding of dead fish in Europe's seas, and make sure that in future fishing quotas are based on good science, not on bad politics.

Making a practical difference

Chris' other major success was in promoting carbon capture and storage (CCS), a technology that has the potential to drastically cut carbon emissions from industry and power generation. He helped to set up a new EU fund back in 2009 to get carbon capture projects off the ground, steering legislation through the Parliament and building support for the technology among countries such as Germany which were initially strongly opposed.

Now, five years on, it's finally been announced that the new White Rose power plant in Yorkshire will receive €300m (£238m) from the fund. The coal plant, which is set to be the first large-scale CCS project in Europe, will capture and bury 90% of CO2 emissions, provide cleaner electricity for 630,000 homes and support up to 2000 jobs in the region. And it is just one of 19 projects across the EU receiving a total of €1bn of funding to help tackle climate change and to reduce the carbon cost of energy production across Europe. This is an example of how winning the argument in the European Parliament can make a real difference in building a greener and more prosperous future, both at home and abroad.

I have also been elected by the MEPs to a role, quaintly called a 'Queastor,' and along with 4 others

we will be responsible for the smooth running of the parliament so the MEPs can work effectively. We have been likened to the shop stewards. However the ticket I ran on, unsurprisingly, is that of making the Parliament 'greener', and looking at our transport and our use of bottled water is just the start. I see no sense in making legislation to protect the environment across Europe if we don't start by doing it at home. Time will tell how successful I am, but I am determined to have a good try. Over the next five years, it will be more important than ever to build support for policies that will protect our environment and promote sustainable growth. Unless we act now, we are in danger of ruining the planet forever. But if we are to truly prevent climate change, cut down on wasteful consumption and reverse the dramatic loss of biodiversity, we will need to work together - in our homes, our workplaces, across countries, continents and political parties. I might be the sole Lib Dem voice in the European Parliament, but I am determined to play my part!

Catherine Bearder is Lib Dem MEP in the South East

www.alde.eu