

Hustings guide

European Parliament elections 2009

Local events and hustings guide

February 2009

The European Parliament

In June 2009, half a billion European residents will elect 736 MEPs in the biggest trans-national election in history. 72 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will be elected from the UK.¹

This is our opportunity to put development and environmental issues at the heart of the European Parliament election agenda and to ensure that the MEPs elected use their votes in Brussels to further the causes that we champion.

European Union (EU) countries provide over half of all development aid and form the world's largest trade bloc. The EU is central to the campaign for more and better aid, debt cancellation and trade justice. The EU will also be vital in achieving a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to a safe level.

The European Parliament decides on budgets, scrutinises aid programmes and has to ratify all European trade agreements. It also has the power to co-legislate together with the European Council. That means it is far too important to be ignored.

For more information on the European Parliament, please see <http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/eu-institutions.html>.

How do the European Parliament elections work?

Constituencies

There are twelve European Parliament Regions.

In England they are: Eastern, East Midlands, London, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humber.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also electoral regions.

Although each person has only one vote, several MEPs, elected through a proportional representation system, will represent their constituency. This is useful for lobbying, because if one of your MEPs does not want to take on your cause, another might. It also means that there are more small parties represented.

Once elected, the UK MEPs will link up with similar parties in other European countries, to make pan-European political parties.

If you want to find out more about where candidates stand on issues of global poverty and climate change, please email Europe@bond.org.uk.

Organising hustings

What: Hustings/public debates and events with debates between MEP candidates on issues related to international development and climate change. These events can take many different forms, including traditional hustings; Question Time style panel debates; “speed dating” events where MEP candidates sit at different tables and groups of activists move from table to table asking them about specific issues (e.g. there could be one climate change group, one fair trade group, one debt cancellation group). By the end of the “speed dating” event all candidates would have met all interest groups and vice versa and the activists would have had a good chance to discuss the issues most important to them in a small group.

When: 9-18 May 2009. This will coincide with the 10 days of pan-European action ahead of the EU elections, when public events will take place right across Europe to highlight the role of development and climate change in the EU elections. If you would like to organise a hustings event, but are not able to organise it during these dates, it will be possible to organise it earlier. If so, please contact Europe@bond.org.uk to discuss.

Where: Somewhere in your regional constituency. Alternatively, depending on the number of candidates participating and the expected size of the audience, you may want to organise the debate in a school auditorium, a town hall, a conference venue or at the premises of an NGO or a community organisation if they have a suitably large room/venue. Theatres and places of faith-based congregations could also be used for the event.

Why: To highlight the role of development and climate change in the EU elections to the public, MEP candidates and the media; to find out what each candidate thinks about development and climate change; to put pressure on MEP candidates to make commitments regarding development and climate change; provide an opportunity for activists to ask questions from MEPs regarding development and climate change; generate local news stories regarding the local candidates and their stances on development and climate change issues. Provide a basis for future dialogue between candidates and our activists regarding our issues

How: The aim is to have at least one event in each electoral region, but more than one can be organised, especially if they are on slightly different topics. This will depend largely on the groups and networks active in different regions and how they organise themselves.

The BOND Secretariat will keep a record of exactly who is organising what in which region, so if you are interested in organising a hustings event or want to team up with other organisations/groups and organise an event, please get in touch with the BOND Secretariat on Europe@bond.org.uk

A few tips for those wanting to organise hustings

Before the event

- Team up with other local organisations or groups working on environmental and social issues, the earlier the better. Email Europe@bond.org.uk to find out whether someone is already planning an event in your region

- Get a motivated action team/steering committee together, willing to make the event a success.
- The Electoral Commission has calculated that the total cost of organising a husting event is around £1,000 but that can be reduced drastically if you manage to find a venue which you can use for free. BOND is not able to help you with the costs of the event but will be able to provide you with printed materials and other printed materials.
- Send an invitation to the event to *all* MEP candidates in your region. If only some candidates are invited, it may be considered a non-cash in kind gift by the Electoral Commission. It is enough that you invite them. If they don't all show up, it is not an in kind gift as long as all candidates received an invitation.
- Invite the candidates to your hustings/debate as early as possible, as they have busy diaries during the election period.
- You could collect signatures for a petition to present to the candidates on the day. It could be a way of showing the candidates that members of the public are concerned about development and climate change issues in the EU context.
- Send a press release to local/regional newspapers about the eventⁱⁱ
- If your event is looking promising, invite regional TV and radio to the event.
- Try to send MEP candidates briefing materials about the issues the debate will address. This could be the international election manifesto developed by BOND and partner networks.
- Try to ensure that there is as big an audience as possible. Don't forget the power of the internet – email lists and a good website can get your message a long way in terms of motivating people to come.

During the event

- Consider beginning the event with an 8-10 minute on the role that the EU can play in development, where it has disappointed, and where there are opportunities. Try to get someone engaging to do this, as it will set the tone for a hopefully interesting debate. If you can't think of a good speaker for your debate, please email Europe@bond.org.uk to see if we can put you in touch with potential speakers.
- Ensure that the meeting to be chaired by someone who is firm and fair. They need to control the length of time that candidates have to present their case (about 5 – 10 minutes each) and the length of time each questioner has (about 1 minute each). They also need to be someone who will make sure that all your important lobby points get made.
- Ensure all candidates are cared for before, during and after the debate. If they are travelling to the event, ensure that there is someone to pick them up and bring them to the venue, that they have water etc available during the debate, and that someone thanks them afterwards for their participation.

- Ensure all candidates are treated equally during the debate, even if you don't agree with some of them. Treating candidates differently (in terms of the time they are given to speak, the tone that the moderator addresses them in etc) will make the debate seem biased and unprofessional.
- Make sure that there is a PA system and roving microphone in the hall if it is large.
- Make sure everyone in the audience has a genuine chance to ask a question. Don't limit questions to coming only from your own organisation's activists or people you know.

After the event

- Make sure you thank all candidates properly so that they feel cared for, and offer them a way of getting in touch with you, should they want to follow-up on anything after the debate.
- Depending on the success of the event, make sure that there is follow up work media-wise. The simplest thing is to post something on your own website if you have one, or on a blog. A slightly more ambitious plan would involve writing a press release regarding the outcome of the debate and try to promote the outcomes of the debate in local/regional press, TV and radio.
- Report back to BOND on how the debate went (Europe@bond.org.uk). You may also want to report back to all NGOs/networks/individuals that helped organise the event.
- Ensure that the venue used for the debate is cleaned properly, that all equipment used has been returned to its rightful owners and any bills/fees have been paid.

Questions you could ask MEP candidates during hustings

On climate change

- If you are elected as an MEP, what will you do to ensure that EU member states domestically reduce emissions by at least 30% by 2020 and by least 80% by 2050 (both compared to 1990 levels)?
- What will you do to ensure that the EU will push for effective and immediate action on climate change at the global climate change summit in Copenhagen in December 2009?
- Will you work to ensure that the EU assists and helps pay for developing countries to reduce their emissions, develop cleanly and adapt to climate change?

On trade

- Will you work to scrap unfair trade deals like Economic Partnership Agreements, in their current form, in the European Parliament?
- How will you ensure that the European Commission changes its aggressive trade liberalisation agenda?
- How will you ensure that trade relations with countries in the global south are mutually beneficial and will help eradicate poverty in the poorest countries in the world?

On Food Security

- Will you work to ensure the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is changed so that it doesn't give EU countries an unfair advantage compared to countries in the Global South?
- What will you do concretely to ensure that food poverty is tackled, both within the EU and in the global south?

On gender equality

- Do you think that EU aid should support specific actions on women's rights and gender equality?
- Do you think that the EU should pay more attention to the rights of women, both in the EU and globally?

On labour rights

- What will you do to promote labour rights, both in the EU and in the developing world if you are elected?

On debt cancellation

- Will you work to ensure that the EU takes action to ensure its members cancels unfair debt from countries in the Global South?
- Will you work to ensure that debt cancellation isn't counted by EU governments as overseas aid if you are elected?

On Aid commitments

- How will you ensure that the EU reaches the agreed target of 0.7% Gross National Income for overseas development aid by 2015 or sooner (without including debt relief or other non-aid items)?
- Do you think that allocating 50% of overseas development aid should be earmarked for sub-Saharan Africa?
- How will you ensure that the EU will put pressure on other governments in the industrialised world to increase the quantity and quality of their overseas development aid?

On Democratic Accountability

- How will you ensure that the EU is more accountable to its citizens on development issues, as well as other issues?

On Corporate Accountability

- How will you work to increase legal requirements on EU-based companies operating in developing countries, such as mandatory reporting, directors' duties to consider stakeholders and the environment, and the chance of redress for people and communities harmed, if justice fails them in the country in which an abuse took place?

Please send relevant responses of your candidates, to Europe@bond.org.uk

Keep a copy of the successful candidate's statements, made before the election, so that you can hold them to account in the future.

ⁱ This is 6 fewer than in 2004, because of the expansion of the EU.

ⁱⁱ Guidance at

<http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/How20to20campaigner20guides+219.twl>