

DAILY NEWS to Members: 12/02/2007 by Andrea Bumcke

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COMMITTEES RESHUFFLE

After a drawn-out period of bitter wrangling, MEPs appointed last week at a series of special meetings on 31 January and 1 February the chairs and vice-chairs of the European Parliament's twenty permanent Committees and two sub-committees. The chairs and vice-chairs are due to serve for the second half of the current Parliament's term of office, until the next European elections in June 2009.

The Parliament's Committees meet in public twice a month. Their role is to analyse legislative proposals from the European Commission and the amended texts drawn up by the Council of Ministers, also drafting reports on their own initiative on subjects of current political interest. Top posts are allocated to groups under a formula known as the *D'Hondt system*, based on the number of MEPs they have. The European People's Party (EPP-ED) – the biggest group – had the right to choose nine posts, while the Socialists claimed seven and the Liberals three. The European United Left, the Greens and the Union for Europe of the Nations appointed one Chairman each.

Following the election of former EPP-ED leader Hans-Gert Pöttering as Parliament president in mid-January – which cost the group points under the D'Hondt system – fellow German centre-right MEP Elmar Brok was ousted as chairman of the Parliament's powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and Karl-Heinz Florenz had to hand over the Environment chair, following intense pressure from Polish colleagues, to Czech Conservative Miroslav Ouzky, vice chairs being Dutchman Johannes Blokland, Finnish Green Satu Hassi, Romanian Liberal Alexandru-Ioan Mortun, and young Danish Socialist Dan Jorgensen.

This quarrel between German and Polish delegations on the redistribution of top jobs resulted in the vote on the composition of Parliamentary committees being postponed from the Parliament's mid-January Strasbourg Plenary. The dispute over committee chairs in the EPP-ED follows a narrow election of Frenchman Joseph Daul as group leader, which also exacerbated tensions in the group.

As a result, in the Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee, German centre-right Angelika Niebler has replaced UK MEP Giles Chichester, who enjoyed a successful two and a half years in which he worked to promote a balanced energy policy. She therefore will be chairing ITRE at a time when it will be tasked to scrutinise important legislative proposals emerging from the Commission's Energy Package, and has said that she will "mobilise the whole weight of the committee" in this work. The committee keeps two old vice-chairs, Czech far left MEP Miloslav Ransdorf and Italian centre-right MEP Renato Brunetta, while gaining two new, Romanian Liberal MEP Silvia Ciornei, and French Socialist Catherine Trautman.