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instigate the systemic reform itself.

Before Croatia joins the European Union in July next year, its voters will elect a number of its national parliamentarians to act as members of the European Parliament for the remainder of this Parliament’s term. This will bring the number of MEPs to 756. At the elections in June 2014, however, Croatian MEPs will be included in the 751 seats ordained for the Parliament by the Lisbon treaty. That wonderful treaty also gave to Parliament the job of making a proposal as to its future composition to the European Council. There are some certain obligations, namely that no state shall have more than 96 seats or fewer than six, and that the distribution of seats shall be degressively proportional.

While the treaty itself does not define degressive proportionality, both the Parliament and the Council of Ministers agreed in the run-up to the Lisbon treaty’s entry into force that it would be interpreted to mean that MEPs elected in larger states will represent more citizens than MEPs elected in smaller states and, conversely, that smaller states will have fewer MEPs than larger ones. In the past, every redistribution of seats has triggered an uneasily squabbly at the level of the Council (which has to decide on this by unanimity). Seats in the Parliament have been traded like pawns for larger, other, concessions, usually in inter-governmental conference.

Interestingly, few heads of government seem to care to maximise the number of their MEPs; indeed, I know some who would not mind having fewer to contend with.

Tension rises, however, on the matter of pairing—i.e.,: other words, ensuring that party of each state is kept among roughly similar states such as Poland and Spain, Italy and the UK, and Belgium and the Netherlands. The ad hoc manner and lack of rigour that have occasionally marred the apportioning of seats are undermining the political legitimacy of the Parliament.

Importantly, the relative under-representation of the larger states has been criticised by Germany’s constitutional court in Karlsruhe, as has the fact that the composition of the present Parliament breaches the Lisbon treaty principle of degressive proportionality. It will not be long, in these litigious times, before someone takes the Parliament to court to force it to rectify the situation. Better to institute the systemic reform itself, as recommended by mathematical approach comes to make a mathematical formula for the distribution of seats that could replace the current system of barter and that would be as far as possible clear, neutral and durable. The new methodology agreed is called the Cambridge Compromise (CamCom).

While variants on this formula can be discussed, intensive scientific scrutiny of CamCom has not negated its essential strength in mathematical terms. CamCom does what it has to do in terms of fairness, transparency and legal certainty. In any case, no other mathematical approach comes to widely different results if it is accepted that all available 751 seats are to be used up.

In practical terms, the one inescapable feature of the maths is that the middling-sized states are at the moment over-represented. For that reason, several MEPs from those states have reacted against CamCom, making it difficult for the raw proposal to win the large majority in the Parliament desirable for constitutional innovations. My proposal is to phase in the introduction of CamCom over three elections with corrections to ensure that no state would lose more than two MEPs in any one election (with the exception of Germany, which, according to the treaty, must go down from 99 to 96 in 2014). The remaining seats would be given to states in proportion to how far below their strict entitlement they still are, while respecting degressive proportionality. Such a gradualist approach will end up with the full CamCom formula in 2024, as illustrated in the table on this page.

The accession of other states before then, such as Iceland, would quicken the transition. And one should not underestimate the short-term impact of demographic change and migration: the number of Germans, for example, continues to fall both in real terms and relative to the French and British, which are growing fast.

The European Court of Justice (and its friends in Karlsruhe) could be expected to accept an approach determined scientifically, as this has been, that would eventually bring the Parliament into line with its treaty obligations. The question now is can the Parliament bite the mathematical bullet or will it succumb, as the Council has done before it, to the ways and means of the Oriental bazaar?

Croatia, by the way, would get 11 MEPs.

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