

STRAND ONE INFORMATION PAPER (23 February 1998)

**OPTIONS FOR THE FILLING OF CASUAL VACANCIES AS PRACTISED
IN ELECTED INSTITUTIONS IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

Introduction

1. At the Strand One meeting on 2 February participants asked the Strand One Secretariat to prepare an information paper outlining the approach taken by elected institutions in European countries to the filling of casual vacancies in the event of a seat becoming vacant. This information is set out below.

2. Participants may now wish to have a further discussion of the options for candidate replacement in the event of a seat becoming vacant in a future Northern Ireland elected institution. When last discussed in Strand One participants noted that this was an important issue because by-elections could upset the proportional balance in an Assembly. Some parties expressed the view that there might be merit in some form of party "reserves" list system whereby parties would nominate potential replacements prior to the election. Other parties suggested that there should be safeguards to prevent parties replacing delegates who fall out of favour.

Background

3. Denmark, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Finland and Greece all operate a list system of proportional representation for national and European elections. In each case, casual vacancies are filled by the next candidate on the list of the party holding the seat. Belgium also operates a list system, but vacancies are filled by substitutes, designated at the time of the election.

4. Sweden operates a list system of PR for national and European elections. However, the filling of casual vacancies is accomplished by a

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candidate being taken from a separate list of replacements or "alternates" published at the time of the original elections and elected at the same time as the MP.

5. The electoral system in Italy for national elections is a complex "mixed" system of proportional representation **and** majoritarian (first-past-the-post). In the case of seats which are elected on the majoritarian system, the occurrence of a casual vacancy results in the holding of a by-election. Those seats allocated on the basis of PR are filled by candidates from the same party from the party list. This is also the case for vacancies arising for the European Parliament which operates a fixed list system of PR.

6. France operates entirely different systems for national and European elections. National elections are based on a majority system in two rounds, with single member constituencies. For European elections there is a proportional system with party lists, with the whole country as a single constituency. National vacancies are filled by by-elections, European vacancies by the next candidate on the party list.

7. The Republic of Ireland operates an STV system for both national and European elections. National vacancies are filled by by-elections. European vacancies were formally filled simply by nomination by the party holding the seat, but this has now been replaced by a system of substitutes designated at the time of the election.

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