

# ONE ON ONE

## Well connected

On the 30th anniversary of relations between the Australian and European parliaments, the leader of a visiting delegation talks about European interests in the Asia Pacific.

European MP Mara Bizzotto believes Australia has a vital role to play in pressuring countries such as China to improve their human rights as the world looks to exploit booming Asian economies. The chair of the European parliament's delegation for relations with Australia and New Zealand indicated that it is more important than ever for Australia to keep strong ties with Europe as the region seeks to increase connections to Asia.

On a recent visit to Australia with members of the delegation she chairs, Ms Bizzotto said Europe can take advantage of Australia's proximity to Asia to help push better human rights for citizens.

And Ms Bizzotto said other complex global issues such as climate change and continued recovery from the financial crisis will also require a united front from parliaments around the world.

Many Australians are probably unfamiliar with the European parliament, which first met in the early 1950s, but Ms Bizzotto says visits by her delegation to Australia are worthwhile.

"The fact that we have been meeting regularly for the last 30 years shows that there is a common core of history and culture in the EU and Australia," she said.

Ms Bizzotto, from Italy, was first elected to public office at just 21 and has been in the European parliament since 2009.

Twenty-seven countries are now part of the European parliament in which 736 MPs sit.

At a time when Europe is still struggling with the fallout from the euro zone debt crisis, Ms Bizzotto said the parliament is facing the challenges of achieving greater political unity, which will be crucial for the future social and economic growth of Europe.

And the parliament is also keeping a close eye on the spreading upheaval in the Middle East and north Africa.

"We're apprehensive that this great desire for freedom on the part of the people of north Africa will result in unforeseeable economic and humanitarian consequences," she said.

While the European parliament has been busy dealing with the near economic collapse of countries such as Greece and Ireland as unemployment across the region spirals, countries like China and India are flexing their economic muscle and forging ahead.

Ms Bizzotto said it is clear the world is entering the century of the Asia Pacific and Australia has a key role to play in developing events.

"You can no longer really talk about India and China as emerging countries – that's an out-of-date concept because these countries have now actually emerged," she said.



**STRONG LINKS:** European MP Mara Bizzotto speaking at Parliament House. Photo: Andrew Dawson

"But in the EU we feel that we all must act together because China and India and other Asian countries are developing very fast economically but they're not always providing civil rights, human rights and the personal freedoms that should be respected.

"If we look at what's happened in north Africa we can see that the new generations in particular are seeking by means of peaceful revolutions to find not only personal freedom but also economic security and that will apply not just to north Africa but to China too."

In the same week the delegation visited Canberra, Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the government would move to put a price on carbon by July 2012 before moving to an emissions trading scheme in around three to five years.

With global action stalling after the failed Copenhagen climate change conference in 2009, the European parliament is keeping a close check on whether the Australian government's plans to implement a carbon price will be successful.

Europe has pledged to cut carbon emissions by 20 per cent by 2020.

Ms Bizzotto said it is crucial for Australia and Europe to be heading in the same direction on climate change but efforts must also be made to get the US on board.

"It should not just be Europe pursuing sustainable development or Australia in isolation because if we don't all agree on this then we're not going to be able to go for a green production model," she said.

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## Question Time

### Appropriate appropriations

#### Question

Why can't money bills be introduced in the Senate?

#### Answer

A bill for government spending is formally known as an appropriation bill.

Appropriation bills, when passed by both houses of parliament, allow the government to spend money it has gathered from the community through taxes and charges.

Any spending by the government must be authorised by legislation (section 83 of the Constitution), and this legislation must be introduced in the House of Representatives as stated in section 53 of the Constitution: "Proposed laws appropriating revenue or moneys, or imposing taxation, shall not originate in the Senate..."

Section 53 maintains the financial initiative of the executive: only the government can request that an appropriation be made or increased, or propose to impose or increase taxation.

The Senate may not amend any appropriation bills to increase expenditure under the bill and instead must send a request to the House to make any amendments. Section 53 of the Constitution states: "The Senate may at any stage return to



BILLS ON BILLS: *The Constitution requires money bills to be introduced in the House. Photo: iStockphoto*

the House of Representatives any proposed law which the Senate may not amend, requesting, by message, the omission or amendment of any items or provisions therein. And the House of Representatives may, if it thinks fit, make any of such omissions or amendments, with or without modifications."

Additionally, the purpose of all appropriations have to first be recommended by the Governor-General (section 56 of the Constitution), who can act only on the advice of the government.

A recent example of the effect of section 53 on legislation was the introduction in the Senate of the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010.

The bill was viewed as being constitutionally contentious on the grounds that, if enacted, it would appropriate money. The Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations estimated the cost of the bill to be \$270 million over three years.

The bill was introduced in the Senate on 28 October last year by NSW Senator Fiona Nash, and aimed to include students from inner regional areas in independent youth allowance measures for students from outer regional and remote locations.

Senator Nash contended the bill did not itself appropriate money as the funding was to be drawn from a standing appropriation (under the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999).

House practice and standing orders consider bills that increase expenditure under a standing appropriation are themselves bills that appropriate revenue or money.

On 21 February 2011, when the bill was sent to the House, the Speaker made a statement about the constitutional provisions and the responsibilities of the House. The Leader of the House moved that the House affirm the constitutional position as stated and decline to consider the bill. After some debate this was agreed to by a majority. •

### Do you have a question?

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Climate change is not the only sticky issue facing Europe and Australia as both parliaments grapple with debates around immigration.

The federal government has decided to re-embrace multiculturalism at a time when some European countries are rejecting it.

The leaders of both Germany and the UK have branded the policy a failure because some immigrants are not integrating.

Ms Bizzotto said while multiculturalism has been largely successful in Australia, she is unsure whether this will continue.

"Religion has not been seen as a factor in the equation governing integration but I see that debate is now opening up and some people are asking whether you can keep the doors open to everyone regardless of religious background," she said. •