

## **European Union (Information, etc.) Bill [HL]**

### **HL Bill 29 of 2017–19**

#### **Introduction**

The European Union (Information, etc.) Bill [HL] is a private member's bill introduced by Lord Dykes (Crossbench). The Bill had its first reading in the House of Lords on 4 July 2017 and is scheduled to receive its second reading on 20 July 2018.

#### **Key Provisions**

Clause 1 of the Bill would require the UK Government to provide “information and statistics relating to the European Union” in both written and electronic form. Local authorities would be required to distribute this information free of charge in public buildings, which clause 3 defines as public libraries and borough, town, city and county council administrative buildings. The Bill would also require the UK Government to make this information freely available on the internet. The Bill defines “information and statistics relating to the EU” to mean information and statistics on: the purpose, scope and effect of the EU's activities; the organisation of the EU, its infrastructure and institutions; decisions taken by the EU and the principle of subsidiarity; and details on the Treaty of Lisbon 2009.

Clause 2 would require information on the EU's town twinning support scheme to be made available by local authorities both in public buildings, defined as above, and on the internet. This would include information on: forms of support (including financial) provided by the EU to facilitate town twinning schemes; the scope and benefits of town twinning schemes; and the procedures involved in applying to the EU for support for town twinning schemes.

The Bill would apply to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The substantive clauses would come into force six months after the Bill received royal assent.

#### **Background**

Lord Dykes has previously stated that similar provisions in earlier versions of the Bill had been “designed to be permissive, not mandatory, and to fill a gap in [UK] citizens' knowledge about the EU, through information found in town halls, libraries and other appropriate public buildings”.<sup>1</sup> He has described the current Bill's intentions as follows:

The Bill provides for information centres to be established in public libraries and other obvious public buildings with full information on the EU institutions and structures, laying out the architecture of the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. No policy matters would of course be included except the objective description of the gradually developing treaty base from the founding Treaty of Rome and details where relevant of each country's legislative responses using the regulations, directives and decisions, mainly in this case of course in the UK.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Dykes has introduced iterations of the European Union (Information, etc.) Bill in a number of parliamentary sessions in recent years. The first version of the Bill was introduced in the 2006–07 session. It passed through the House of Lords but did not progress through the House of Commons before the end of that session. This first version of the Bill, and versions introduced in later sessions, also included provision for the EU flag to be flown alongside the UK flag on government and public buildings if this was deemed appropriate.<sup>3</sup>

Previous governments have resisted the need for the Bill. For example, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, speaking for the Labour Government in 2006, argued that much information on the EU was “already freely and widely available to the public”.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the Government at that time had “strong reservations about the Bill” and was of the view that it was “not absolutely necessary”. In addition, Baroness Royall stated that the Government also had “strong reservations” about the “element of compulsion” implied by the words “shall be” in the Bill. Lord Dykes disagreed with this interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

### **Twining**

The EU supports twinning activity by towns and local authorities both within the EU and with partner bodies in selected other countries.<sup>6</sup> These include candidate and potential candidate countries for future EU membership and countries in the EU’s Neighbourhood region. In 2010, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which describes itself as representing 130,000 local governments across 42 countries and which has received financial assistance from the EU in support of its twinning activity, estimated that the UK had 2,059 twinning arrangements in ‘wider Europe’.<sup>7</sup> However, it has been reported in recent years that a number of UK towns and local authorities have considered ending twinning arrangements with partner bodies elsewhere in the EU.<sup>8</sup>

### **Further Information**

- UK Parliament website, [‘European Union \(Information, etc.\) Bill \[HL\] 2017–19’](#)
- UK Parliament website, [‘European Union \(Information, etc.\) Bill \[HL\] 2016–17’](#)
- UK Parliament website, [‘European Union \(Information, etc.\) Bill \[HL\] 2015–16’](#)
- UK Parliament website, [‘European Union \(Information, etc.\) Bill \[HL\] 2014–15’](#)
- UK Parliament website, [‘European Union \(Information, etc.\) Bill \[HL\] 2006–07’](#)

<sup>1</sup> [HL Hansard, 15 December 2006, cols 1774 and 1788.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Text provided by Lord Dykes on request from the Library.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: [European Union \(Information, etc.\) Bill \[HL\]](#) (HL Bill 28 of session 2016–17), 6 June 2016.

<sup>4</sup> [HC Hansard, 15 December 2006, col 1785.](#)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, cols 1784–91.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, [‘Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency: Europe for Citizens—Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation’](#), accessed 5 July 2018; [‘European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations: Twining’](#), accessed 5 July 2018; and [‘Twining: 20 Years of Successfully Sharing EU Expertise Through Over 2700 Projects’](#), 7 February 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Council of European Municipalities and Regions, [‘Introducing CEMR’](#), 2014; [‘Numbers by Country’](#), 2008; and [Table Showing the Number of Twinning in Wider Europe in 2010](#), 2010.

<sup>8</sup> BBC News, [‘Why are Towns Un-twinning?’](#), 5 January 2012; and [‘Bridgend Twining ‘Important’ After Brexit, German Mayor Says’](#), 8 March 2017.

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