

Delivering for Britain

MEP Contact Newsletter

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Conservative MEPs Demand a Referendum

Conservative MEPs are at the forefront of the campaign for a referendum in Britain on the revived EU Constitution. At the Conservative Party 2007 Conference in Blackpool, MEPs are launching a postcard campaign to Gordon Brown and collecting signatures on a 'referendum wall.'

The Leader of the Conservative MEPs, Timothy Kirkhope, said: *"The British people were promised a referendum on the Constitution by Labour. Gordon Brown has a moral obligation to deliver on that promise. It is clear that confidence in the EU and in politicians is fatally damaged when governments blatantly renege on promises."*



Timothy Kirkhope, Leader of the Conservative MEPs

Labour ignore Strasbourg plea

Conservative MEPs wrote to the Prime Minister before the last EU Summit urging him to put the issue of the European Parliament's Strasbourg seat on the agenda of the EU's Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC). The letter pointed out independent studies showing that maintaining the European Parliament's Strasbourg seat costs taxpayers at least £120 million a year and causes 18,901 tonnes of CO₂ emissions. Last year, over one million people signed an Internet petition, promoted by Conservative MEPs, calling for Strasbourg to be scrapped.

Labour Ministers have consistently refused to raise the issue in EU meetings, but Conservatives have continued their campaign within Parliament. Philip Bradbourn MEP worked with the Campaign for Parliament Reform to table an amendment to a key report on the IGC calling for the Strasbourg issue to be considered as part of discussion on any new EU Treaty. Unfortunately, the amendment was defeated by 370 votes to 280, but this relatively high level of support was seen as a clear signal that opinion in the Parliament is shifting in the direction of those who want to scrap Strasbourg. Conservative Budgets Spokesman, Richard Ashworth MEP, said: *"Surely the time has come for this Parliament to listen to and respond to the concerns and the demands of one million European citizens."*



Philip Bradbourn MEP



Richard Ashworth MEP

Equitable Life compensation call

After an exhaustive inquiry by MEPs, the European Parliament has adopted a report on the Equitable Life crisis in which thousands of Britons lost their savings and pensions. The report was adopted by 602 votes to 13, with 64 abstentions. Labour MEPs were among the abstentions and UKIP among those who voted against. Conservatives voted in favour. The report criticised the UK regulatory framework in which the collapse of Equitable Life occurred and called for a 'tightening up' of the monitoring of EU legislation in the field, as well as an overhaul of EU policy and legislation. It also recommended that the British Government set up a compensation scheme for victims. Sir Robert Atkins MEP, Deputy Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament and a member of the inquiry team, said: *"I believe that due to its failure adequately to protect policy holders in accordance with EU legislation, the UK Government is obliged to devise an appropriate scheme to ensure full compensation for victims of the debacle. Having categorically proven that the UK and EU financial redress systems are unsatisfactory and lack the requisite level of security that one would expect from the Single Market, the EU institutions and the British Government must urgently combine forces to ensure that higher standards of investor protection and security are legally enforced. This is imperative if people are to be expected to save judiciously for their retirements."*



Rt Hon Sir Robert Atkins MEP with Mr Colin Slater Vice Chairman of the Equitable Life Members' Action Group

Conservatives condemn Mugabe invitation



Geoffrey Van Orden MEP

Conservative MEPs are urging the Portuguese EU Council Presidency not to allow Robert Mugabe to attend the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon on 8-9 December. Geoffrey Van Orden MEP, who has written to the Portuguese Prime Minister, the President of the African Union and the British Foreign Secretary calling for further action against the Mugabe regime, said: *"If it is to have any credibility, the EU must stand firm. An invitation to Mugabe would mean that the EU's targeted sanctions policy was not worth the paper it was written on. Even talk of inviting Mugabe gives comfort to his appalling regime. We need principled leadership on this issue from the major African countries and from our own Government, not a vanity project from the EU Presidency."*

Nirj Deva MEP, Conservative International Development Spokesman, called on the European Commission to ban Mugabe from attending. He said: *"Frankly, I would rather see this Summit cancelled, than see it completely discredited by allowing this international outcast to attend. After all, this Summit is dealing with democracy and human rights in Africa – how on earth can we discuss this seriously when their biggest abuser is violating these principles with impunity?"*



Nirj Deva MEP

Conservative victory on cat and dog fur ban



Struan Stevenson MEP

The European Parliament voted unanimously to approve an EU-wide ban on the import, export and trade in cat and dog fur. The new law, which will enter into force in all 27 EU Member States by the end of 2008, is predicted to save the lives of more than two million cats and dogs every year in China. Conservative MEPs have campaigned for the ban since 1999 but there are still many shoppers in the

UK and Europe who are unaware that the items they purchase are actually made from the skins of cats and dogs. Labels often give scant information of the source and often carry confusing names of non-existent animals. Struan Stevenson MEP, who led the campaign, hailed the efforts of the millions of people across Europe who signed petitions, sent emails and wrote letters to help persuade the EU to act. He said: *"The horrific trade in cat and dog fur is about to meet its Waterloo."*

Red Card for Sport Proposals

Conservative MEP Chris Heaton-Harris MEP, President of the European Parliament's backbench sport committee and a qualified football referee, has called on the European Commission to go back to the drawing board following the publication of new EU plans to extend its powers into the world of sport. He said: *"Politicians should not be interfering in sport, but as the EU seems determined to do it, it is essential that sporting organisations are involved at every stage. We need a proper consultation across all sports at all levels, not something hidden away in an obscure corner of the Commission's website."*



Chris Heaton-Harris MEP

Success on imperial measures

A long-standing Conservative campaign to preserve miles, yards and pints finally paid off when it was announced that the 'dual marking' of goods in both imperial and metric measurements will 'continue indefinitely'. Under the 1999 Units of Measurement Directive, imperial marking of goods in the UK was due to be phased out once an initial derogation expired. Now that derogation will be made permanent. Conservative Industry Spokesman, Giles Chichester MEP, said: *"I am delighted Conservatives have persuaded the Commission that it is good for international business and good for Britain that traditional measurements are kept. I just hope there won't be any more need for metric martyrs and that the Government will not force metrication down the public's throat."*



Giles Chichester MEP

Labour condemned over new Foot and Mouth crisis

Conservative MEP and Chairman of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, Neil Parish MEP, has said *"the Labour Government has some serious questions to answer over the recent Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreaks in Surrey. This outbreak has been a self-inflicted wound,"* he said. *"Farmers, and the industries directly connected to farming, must receive the compensation they now deserve for the unimaginable worry, inconvenience and losses they are suffering."* He also called for a full, in-depth investigation into who was warned about bio-security concerns at the Government laboratory at the centre of the FMD outbreak. *"If people have been reporting concerns about bio-security at the plant and they have been ignored, whoever ignored them should be brought to account. We also need to know whether any Ministers ever knew about the bio-security concerns and what action they ordered."*



Neil Parish MEP

Conservative MEPs oppose EU tax plan



Jonathan Evans MEP

Conservative MEPs are leading opposition to the latest European Commission attempt to move towards harmonised EU taxes. The European Commission has announced it intends to produce legislation for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) next year. Conservative Economic Affairs Spokesman, Jonathan Evans MEP, warned: *"The plan for a common EU tax base is presented as though its purpose is to assist the single market, but*

we know that the zealots who want a common tax level throughout the EU use precisely the same arguments. Imposing a uniform tax base will rob EU Member States of the flexibility that any national government needs in setting its spending and tax raising priorities. This is the cornerstone of national independence and governments should be wary of allowing it to be eroded."

Cheaper mobile calls in Europe



Malcolm Harbour MEP

The European Parliament has approved a system of formal caps for mobile phone charges for international calls made within the EU. The new law was developed in response to complaints that holidaymakers were being ripped off by mobile phone operators for making and receiving so-called 'roaming' calls while abroad.

Conservative Internal Market

Spokesman, Malcolm Harbour MEP, worked hard to ensure that agreement on the new law could be reached in time for it to be in force for the 2007 summer holiday season and called on the Government to ensure the measures were in place by then. Conservatives also ensured that some of the excessive regulatory requirements brought forward by Socialist MEPs and others were not included in the final agreed text.

Conservatives reject EU foreign policy



Charles Tannock MEP

Conservative MEPs have vigorously opposed plans to develop an EU Foreign Policy by voting against a recent European Parliament report which called on Heads of Government to finalise the Constitutional Treaty by the end of 2008 so as to enhance the EU's role in Foreign and Defence Policy. The report strongly supported plans for an EU Foreign Minister and called for a single EU seat on the UN Security Council. Labour MEPs voted in favour of the report, but tabled an 'explanation of vote' distancing themselves from certain aspects of it. Liberal Democrat MEPs supported it unequivocally. Conservative Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Charles Tannock MEP, pledged to continue Conservative opposition to these plans.

Learning from Finland on waste recycling



Caroline Jackson MEP

Conservative MEP Caroline Jackson, a former Chairman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee, visited Finland recently to see how that country is dealing with an issue that is pre-occupying local authorities in Britain – how to switch away from land filling domestic waste to recycling and reuse. Speaking at the end of her visit, she said: *"In 2000, Finland and the UK both depended on dumping 80% of their waste into landfill. But the Finns are now well ahead of us in promoting recycling with a national figure of over 40%, while the latest figure for Britain is 27%".* Caroline drew three lessons from her talks with the Finnish authorities: first, there are many more highly visible, well-designed collection points for recyclables than the UK; Finns know exactly what they are paying for with regard to waste collection because they pay for it via a separate waste collection tax; and third, Finns are clear that energy from waste plants have a part to play and can be used to deal with residual waste and produce energy.



John Bowis MEP

Call for free movement of patients

The European Parliament has adopted a report on Health Services in the Internal Market, which proposes a range of measures to achieve free movement for patients and make it easy to find the best care all over the EU. It also contains suggestions for safeguarding high quality health services, improving co-

operation between Member States in validating the qualifications of medical professionals and addressing questions of medical insurance. Conservative Health Spokesman, John Bowis MEP, said: *"We very much welcome the prospect of a Commission initiative that would create a genuine single market for patients while at the same time safeguarding patients' rights and safety. There is currently a gap in the EU legal framework which prevents citizens from taking advantage of the single market in this area and this deficiency must be addressed"*.

MEPs condemn "lightbulb tax"



Syed Kamall MEP

Conservative MEPs have condemned EU taxes on energy-efficient lightbulbs from China that were recently renewed by the European Commission. Conservative International Trade Spokesman, Syed Kamall MEP, said: *"This decision is farcical and indefensible. The lightbulb industry wants the duties scrapped, consumers want them scrapped and common sense says they should be*

scrapped; yet the European Commission has once again bowed to protectionist pressures and opted to keep them."

Tributes to Lord Bethell

Conservative MEPs have paid tribute to Nicholas, Lord Bethell, who died from Parkinson's disease in September. He served as an elected member from 1979 to 2003 and sat as a Conservative peer in the House of Lords. Fluent in Russian and Polish, Lord Bethell translated the work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other Russian and Polish writers into English. In 1991, the Polish Government awarded him the Order of Merit at the Commander's level. He was the President of the Friends of Gibraltar's Heritage from 1992 to 2001 and the Friends of Cyprus Association from 2001. He was a leading light in the movement to keep Gibraltar British.



Edward McMillan-Scott MEP

Edward McMillan-Scott MEP, a close friend of Lord Bethell, said: *"Nick was a hugely talented and impressive Conservative MEP, who even after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, continued to contribute to our Delegation in the European Parliament and to the Conservative Party. During his time in the European Parliament, he fought for the rights of Gibraltarians, he fought against the Soviet regime in the 1980s, he took on the airlines to fight for the freedom of the skies, and was a champion for human rights around the world winning the friendship of Lech Walesa, Nelson Mandela, and Andrei Sakharov. He was awarded the Schuman Medal shortly before his retirement from the European Parliament. He will be sadly missed."*

Conservatives warn over EU pesticides ban

Conservative MEPs have warned that farmers will suffer reduced crop yields as a result of a proposed EU pesticides ban. Robert Sturdy MEP said: *"The UK has an exceptional record in pursuing environmentally friendly agricultural methods. Although pesticides, if not used in a responsible manner, can be potentially harmful, we should not impose restrictions that are impractical or unworkable."*



Robert Sturdy MEP



Christopher Beazley MEP

Support for Estonia

Earlier this year, the re-location of a Soviet war memorial in Estonia, led to a serious overreaction in Russia where the Estonian Embassy in Moscow was blockaded and cyber attacks on the Estonian Government and banking systems took place. With a long-standing interest in Central and Eastern Europe and commitment to making a success of EU enlargement, Conservative MEP, Christopher Beazley was successful in securing a high-profile debate in Parliament where solidarity with Estonia was expressed. In a subsequent debate on the crisis, Christopher Beazley said: *"Commission President Barroso made the point extremely eloquently at Samara that we express our total solidarity with Estonia – as well as with Poland, with the Czech Republic and, indeed, with my own country, whose Ambassador has also been harassed by Nashi, an organisation from which President Putin does very little to dissociate himself. Is it possible that we can continue to negotiate entry (to the WTO) with a country (Russia) which apparently appears to be implicated in the disruption of electronic communications – as Mr Savi has just explained – with the banking system, with our own security? Surely a very clear message has to be sent to President Putin that, of course, we want to continue these negotiations, but we cannot do so until the cyber-attacks cease."*

Victory over Labour on red tape

Conservative MEP Philip Bushill-Matthews successfully over-turned an attempt by a Labour MEP to pile more regulatory red tape on businesses through a new EU-wide Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) regime. In a key vote, a majority of MEPs supported a voluntary, not compulsory, CSR code. Mr Bushill-Matthews MEP, said: *"This Labour report has been completely turned around. Labour MEP Richard Howitt had called for yet more EU legislation rather than looking for ways of inspiring companies to choose to adopt the concept themselves. The voluntary regime, as originally proposed by the European Commission, has been endorsed. Extra regulation is off the table. Business should be reassured, and those that care about social and environmental issues should also be pleased."*



Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP

Concern raised over EU Funding for Natural Disasters

Conservative MEPs have been quick to press for EU funding in the wake of the disastrous flooding that hit parts of the UK this summer and have been highly critical of the Government's sluggish response, especially its unwarranted delay in applying for EU emergency relief funding. The Conservative Delegation supported a European Parliament resolution in which it urged the European Commission "to introduce...aid arrangements, especially of a financial nature, so as to support the rehabilitation of the regions which have suffered heavy damages, restore the productive potential in the affected areas, seek to re-launch job creation and take the appropriate measures to compensate the social costs inherent in the loss of jobs and other income sources." It also emphasised the need to "speed up the procedure to access EU funds for the recovery of agricultural land following floods...and for more financial aid to be made available in the development of flood defences" and demanded that the Commission "mobilise the current EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) in the most flexible manner possible and without delay, avoiding time-consuming procedures or administrative obstacles." Conservative regional affairs spokesman Den Dover MEP, stressed the need to concentrate on the delivery of aid and not to waste time and effort creating EU bodies. He said: *"While supporting and voting for the Joint Motion for a Resolution on Natural Disasters, British Conservatives have misgivings about the creation of a "European force" (paragraph 9) since we believe that both prevention and rapid reaction capabilities should be concentrated on the resources of the Member States."*



Den Dover MEP

Sad end to battle for barometers



Martin Callanan MEP

The European Parliament has voted to reverse its previous position and ban the production of new mercury barometers following a two year phasing-out period. Back in November 2006, MEPs had supported an amendment tabled by Conservative MEP Martin Callanan which excluded barometers from the Directive. Martin Callanan said:

"I am extremely disappointed at the result of this vote and am particularly annoyed at the lack of support from the British Government who yet again are prepared to see hundreds of years of British tradition destroyed and the production of barometers banned. Mercury does need to be controlled but this could have been done by appropriate safety warnings and careful controls which would have allowed the continuation of barometer production, and safeguarded many jobs and small businesses in the UK and the rest of Europe. This ban brings to an end the tradition of barometer making which was begun in the mid 1600s when mercury barometers were first introduced."

Top EU policy-makers meet

Leading figures from the worlds of politics, business and academia met in Warsaw for the annual Summer University of the European Ideas Network (EIN). Participants at the event discussed this year's theme: 'The World in 2025: Choices and Challenges for Tomorrow'. Among the speakers were Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Craig Mundie (Chief Research and Strategy Officer, Microsoft), Garry Kasparov (United Civil Front, Russia), former Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar and Nobel Prize Winner Lech Walesa. The EIN was founded by Conservative MEP James Elles in 2002 as an open pan-European think-tank process designed to promote new thinking on the key challenges facing the countries of the EU. It has grown rapidly and become an important meeting point and intellectual crossroads for the centre-right in European politics.



James Elles MEP

Call for Ming to come clean

Conservative South East MEP Daniel Hannan has scorned Liberal Democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell's call for poll on secession from the EU. He said: *"What I'd like in an ideal world, and, to be fair, what the Lib Dems, along with every other party, promised at the last election – is a referendum on the issue of the EU constitution. Then again, if eight years in politics has taught me anything, it is never to believe a Liberal Democrat. Sir Ming, like Gordon Brown, is quite prepared to renege on his manifesto commitment. He can read the polls. He knows that there is not the slightest chance that the voters would approve the grisly necromancy that has raised the undead Euro-constitution. So, he reasons, why not tilt the odds in his favour by combining the issue of the constitution with that of whether to stay in the EU? Voters, after all, usually cling to the status quo. True, it's not what he promised; but he'd rather be thought a liar than a loser."*



Daniel Hannan MEP

North West Conservative MEP and former MP, David Sumberg has announced he is retiring at the end of this Parliament in 2009. David has long been a staunch defender of British interests in the European Parliament and his contribution to the work of the British Delegation and the Conservative Party in the North West will be missed by his colleagues.



David Sumberg MEP

Labour told to compensate Britain's duty free victims



John Purvis MEP

Ten British victims of jobsworth customs officers got the backing of the European Parliament earlier this year in their claim for compensation, and resolved to put pressure on the British Government to compensate them for the unlawful confiscation of their property.

The ten were victims of the arbitrary seizure of their vehicles, cigarettes and

alcohol at British ports by customs officials who claimed they were smugglers.

Seizure was commonplace at British ports before the European Commission threatened to take the UK to the European Court of Justice for applying the law disproportionately. Directive 92/12/EEC says that private individuals may acquire any quantity of excise goods in one Member State and bring the goods to the UK without any formalities and without having to pay excise duties on the condition that the goods are intended strictly for the individual's use. The Commission took the view that, although confiscation could be appropriate in cases of genuine for-profit fraud, the UK Government went further than was necessary in certain cases, i.e. in cases of irregular movements without a profit-seeking motive. Although the UK did a policy u-turn last year, the Government has not returned one car, one packet of cigarettes or one bottle of wine to these victims of an unlawful application of the law.

Conservative MEP, John Purvis, who led the calls for action to be taken said: *"Labour is behaving outrageously towards these entirely innocent people. The Government is like a convicted burglar refusing to return the swag. It is against natural justice. I am urging the Commission to take a serious, in-depth look at the situation in order to provide adequate redress for the individuals who had problems before the UK came into compliance with this Directive."*

Supporting British Bikers

East Midlands MEP Roger Helmer donned his leather jacket and took part in a thrilling motorcycle ride around the streets of Strasbourg as part of the 11th annual Anniversary MEP Ride at the European Parliament. The concept of the event, which was organised by FEMA (The Federation of European Motorcyclists' Associations), was to bring together



Roger Helmer MEP

motorcycling enthusiasts from all over Europe with their elected representatives for an enjoyable event that offered them the opportunity to experience the pleasure of motorcycling, while at the same time being briefed on important motorcycling issues. The focus of this year's meeting was motorcycle safety and urban transport, with Mr Helmer and his colleagues being briefed on the views of European motorcyclists on potential motorcycle safety problems. They were also presented with FEMA's 'European Agenda for Motorcycle Safety' which underlines the differences that motorcyclists have from other vehicles and provides a summary of why accidents happen from a rider's perspective and how to improve some areas of concern. Mr Helmer said: *"Motorcycling offers an inexpensive, environmentally friendly and effective means of transport. Hence, the number of motorcycles on European roads has more than doubled over the last two decades. However, while motorcycling presents a solution to many of today's mobility challenges, motorcycle safety is becoming an issue of concern for an ever-increasing number of stakeholders, who overlook the positive aspects motorcycling can bring to the transport mix. I welcomed the opportunity to meet with FEMA's representatives and thoroughly enjoyed riding with them through the streets of Strasbourg in my leather jacket last week."* ■