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MEP Contact Newsletter

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Conservative MEPs demand action on Strasbourg farce

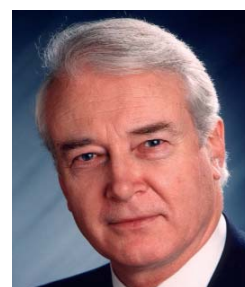
Following the collapse of the ceiling in the European Parliament in Strasbourg during August, Conservative MEPs have called on Gordon Brown to stop dithering and finally end the costly charade of the European Parliament meeting in both Brussels and Strasbourg.



Part of the collapsed ceiling in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, Conservative leader in the European Parliament, said: "The decision regarding the Parliament's locations can only be made by national governments, and to date none of the big players has come out strongly against the monthly move. Gordon

Brown's inability to show leadership in the EU has allowed this situation to continue for far too long. It is high time he sent a clear message to his counterparts that the European Parliament should have only one home."



Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP

Conservatives have long campaigned for Europe's leaders to end European Parliament meetings in Strasbourg, which cost over £160 m , and cause over 20,000 tonnes of CO² emissions each year. Last year, over one million people signed a petition calling for an end to the monthly commute.

Mr Bushill-Matthews said: "In September, we avoided Strasbourg for the first time ever. More and more MEPs hope it will not be the last time we are spared this unnecessary charade. The two-seat Parliament is a symbol of all that must change in the EU. If Europe's leaders are sincere about reform, they should start by scrapping Strasbourg.



The European Parliament in Strasbourg.

MEPs call for an EU-wide missing child alert system



Vice-President Edward McMillan-Scott MEP campaigning with Gerry and Kate McCann for a Europe-wide missing child alert system

A majority of MEPs have signed up to a campaign initiated by Conservative Vice-President of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott MEP – and supported by Gerry and Kate McCann – for a Europe-wide missing children alert system.

According to the Children’s Society, some 130,000 children go missing each year in the UK. Although most are recovered, too many are not.

The EU missing child alert system would include the introduction of a European Missing Child hotline and a European child resource and policy unit. A key element would be the introduction of an Amber Alert system – based on the US model. The Amber Alert (named after nine-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was killed by her abductor) operates like a severe weather warning with messages flashed on radio, television and motorway signs. In the US it has helped the recovery of nearly 400 abducted children since 2003. Eighty per cent have been recovered in the crucial first 72 hours. In Europe, only Belgium and France have fully adopted a similar system.

McMillan-Scott said: “In most countries, including the UK,

there is a patchwork of children’s charities and police schemes which claim to have an alert, but only France and the US have a serious system.

“A UK hotline should be part of a Europe-wide network, which is desperately needed. Thousands of parents want a European children centre – like the one in Washington - to bring together governments, the police and the voluntary sector to work on a united front and eliminate layers of frustrating bureaucracy and duplication of work.

“Sometimes a missing child may be taken across frontiers. If we can afford to put out severe weather warnings, we can afford to save children’s lives. This is a perfect example of what the EU can achieve when countries work together.”

Campaigning against EU interference in sport

Chris Heaton-Harris MEP, Chairman of the European Parliament’s cross-party Sports Intergroup, is spearheading a campaign against unnecessary EU interference in British sport. The EU has no formal power in relation to sport but the Lisbon Treaty would introduce for the first time a legal competence and law-making power for the EU in this area. Last year, the European Commission published a White Paper on Sport setting out a range of possible proposals, including new regulations and a possible ‘European police force for sport’.



Chris Heaton-Harris MEP

Mr Heaton-Harris said: “I believe people should be left to go about their daily lives as much as possible free from any Government interference. Sport is no exception. Decisions about how sport is managed and organised should be left to those who know sport the best, and who have day-to-day involvement with it – in other words, the governing bodies, leagues and clubs.” However, the Labour Government has taken a supportive and encouraging stance toward the European Commission and Labour MEPs voted in favour of it, so efforts to oppose the plans from a British perspective have been undermined.

Conservatives work for lower air fares



Timothy Kirkhope MEP

Cheaper and fairer air fares have taken a step closer in recent months following the adoption of important legislation in the European Parliament. MEPs have approved new rules that will force airlines to include all airport taxes, fees and surcharges in the basic ticket price advertised to customers. The new law, which comes into effect at the end of the

year, is intended to end the situation where someone clicks on a fare advertised at 99p only to end up paying many times that once additional costs are added in. Last year, a study by the European Commission found 137 travel websites were breaking existing EU consumer rules by deliberately misleading customers over price and fare availability.

The European Parliament also adopted legislation drafted by Conservative Transport Spokesman Timothy Kirkhope MEP to open up the computer systems that airlines use to make fares available to travel agents. Mr Kirkhope said: "Current systems allow the airlines that have shares in them to favour their own companies, which distorts competition and drives up prices. We must ensure that flight information provided to travel agents is timely and comprehensive, so that consumers are given the fairest and fullest possible choice available. This system gives consumers more options over the carrier they wish to use, and whether they wish to opt for a more environmentally-friendly alternative to flying."

MEPs urge solidarity with Georgia

Conservative MEPs were at the forefront of calls on EU Leaders to affirm clearly that Russia's disproportionate aggression towards Georgia would be met with serious consequences from the international community.

Conservative Foreign Affairs Spokesman Charles Tannock MEP said the EU should back NATO membership for Georgia and increase aid for reconstruction. At the same time, EU Member States – particularly the UK – should review their visa facilitation arrangements for Russian nationals, cut Russia's aid, suspend partnership and cooperation agreement negotiations, and review Russia's G8 membership.

Dr Tannock said: "Russia's disproportionate aggression against Georgia has overstepped the mark and unless we take a firm line with the Kremlin now, we may regret it later. The EU must not forego this opportunity to use all the diplomatic and financial tools at its disposal to assist the reconstruction efforts in Georgia, and to make the Kremlin realise that aggression towards its neighbours will be met with a united response on both sides of the Atlantic."



Charles Tannock MEP



Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, meeting with the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili

Conservative Leader in the European Parliament Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, who visited Georgia earlier in the year, has proposed a way for an EU-Georgia trade agreement to be fast-tracked before the end of 2008. "This will show Georgia – and Russia – that EU solidarity with Georgia represents real commitment and not just rhetoric," he said.

Improved mobile phone regulations

Conservative Internal Market Spokesman Malcolm Harbour MEP is leading a team of MEPs drawing together new legislation on electronic communications that will boost competition and provide a better deal for users of mobile phones and laptops.



Malcolm Harbour MEP

The new rules will introduce a number of other measures designed to improve users' rights, including an obligation on networks to reveal any restrictions on mobile broadband services, such as whether services like Skype are banned. Mobile networks will also be compelled to transfer a customer's existing mobile phone number to the new network of their choice within a single working day if he or she decides they want to switch. Price plans for mobile phone contracts will also have to be more transparent about the real cost to the consumer of 'free' handsets.

Another proposal under the E-Privacy Directive would see the introduction of a data breach disclosure rule. "Essentially if there is a serious data breach online, it will be mandatory to disclose this to customers who may be affected. It does not cover losses of CDs of data – that is hardly high tech," said Mr Harbour.

MEP condemns EU foreign courts plan



Philip Bradbourn MEP

Conservative Justice Spokesman in the European Parliament Philip Bradbourn MEP has condemned EU proposals under which British citizens could be convicted in their absence by foreign courts for traffic, credit card or other criminal offences. Mr Bradbourn said: "This initiative would enable courts to pass judgments in absentia. It goes

against one of the most fundamental corner-stones of British

justice – that the accused has a right to defend himself at trial. If other EU countries want to go ahead with this proposal that's their choice, but the British Government should have no part of it."

The proposal would also allow British citizens to be extradited automatically under fast-track procedures at the request of another European Union country on the basis of a decision by the foreign court. Although in theory it would be possible for the UK to opt out, the proposal is strongly supported by the Labour Government and so has a good chance of becoming law.

MEPs launch new DVD

Conservative MEPs have launched a new DVD entitled 'MEPs – Making a Difference'. It highlights, in short, digestible clips, examples of how Conservative MEPs have achieved real results on day-to-day issues for their constituents in the UK. It is told from the perspective of those who have been helped by Conservative MEPs over a range of specific issues. Copies are available free from the Conservative MEPs' London Office (see contact details below).

Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague MP has endorsed the DVD saying, "Whatever your view on the EU, this DVD is important viewing. It gives real insight into the work our Conservative MEPs do on behalf of their constituents, their region and their country. The various separate stories are told not just by politicians, but by people who have worked closely with their Conservative MEPs. These people have seen at first hand how our MEPs have influenced the EU agenda, and the results they have achieved".

