

Conservative MEP Monthly Report – October 2008

Ashton confirmed as new EU Commissioner

At the end of October, the European Parliament voted to approve Baroness Ashton as Britain's new EU Commissioner, replacing Peter Mandelson. Conservative Leader in the European Parliament, [Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP](#), said: "Concerns were initially raised by MEPs from a number of different countries that Baroness Ashton did not have the necessary experience for the important trade portfolio. However, she performed positively in her [hearing](#) before the International Trade committee and as a result, that committee recommended that she be confirmed by the Parliament. There is a great deal of important work to be done, and we will work with the new Commissioner towards the objective of promoting more open trade across the world."

Meanwhile, Conservative International Trade Spokesman [Syed Kamall MEP](#) has called for an investigation into a possible conflict of interest that may have arisen for her predecessor over his relationship with Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska whose aluminium company benefited from a £50million cut in EU tariffs three years ago. Syed Kamall said: "The facts concerning his relationship with Mr Deripaska appear to keep changing. The best thing he can do is return to clear things up. I am not accusing Lord Mandelson of doing anything wrong, I am just saying he should clear up these questions. The EU's code of conduct for commissioners says they should rule out "all risks of a conflict of interests" to help "guarantee their independence".

Combined elections on 4 June 2009

The Government has [announced](#) that the European Elections on Thursday 4 June 2009, will be combined with the English local elections that had been scheduled for 7 May.

Hague calls for more Conservative MEPs

In a speech to the Conservative MEPs Fringe Meeting at the Party Conference in Birmingham, Shadow Foreign Secretary **Rt Hon William Hague MP** said: "I want no-one to be in any doubt about the importance of these European elections. They will determine whether Britain's interests are properly represented in the European Parliament, they will be an opportunity for the whole country to have their say on the renamed EU Constitution and they will be the most significant test of national opinion before the next General Election.

"Our MEPs have done great work since they were elected in 2004. Not only have they worked harder than the other parties – and we have the statistics to prove it – they have delivered results for Britain. The EU needs to stop navel-gazing about its institutional structures or seeking to acquire ever more powers for Brussels. Its priorities should be its peoples' priorities, twenty-first century priorities: global competitiveness, global warming and global poverty. And on all three our MEPs have delivered. If our high standards, our visions and our plans for Britain and Europe are judged well by the electorate we have tremendous opportunities before us. With your help we can bring change here in Britain and in Europe."

In his speech to the Party Conference, [Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP](#), Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament, condemned Gordon Brown's broken promise to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, but said that the European Elections next June will be a referendum on Gordon Brown: "Next June we will have the opportunity to give the clearest of signals to Downing Street - and the clearest of signals to Brussels. Conservative MEPs will work for a Europe of free trade, free markets and free choice. A Europe fit for the future. Above all, a Europe that listens to the people."

EU Budget for 2009

At the end of October, the European Parliament adopted its First Reading position on the draft [EU Budget for 2009](#) with commitments of €136 billion (1.04 % of EU GNI) and payments of €124.5 bn (0.959% of GNI). Conservative Budgets Spokesman [Richard Ashworth MEP](#) said: “We approached this budget with three key questions: Are we getting value for money? Does the EU add value in spending this money that national governments could not add themselves? And is there sufficient accountability? There is still far too much waste in the budget, and we will continue to delete budget lines that are not justified. As people across Britain tighten their belts, we think it is imperative to cut the wasteful areas of EU spending.” Conservative MEPs voted to cut costs by ending funding for superfluous EU bodies like the Economic and Social Committee and by scrapping budget lines such as tobacco and wine subsidies. They also supported an unsuccessful effort to withhold five percent of the budget until certain countries meet the requirements of the Court of Auditors.

Sheep Tagging Campaign

Conservative MEPs are [campaigning to persuade the EU to reconsider its system of electronic tagging for sheep](#). Despite Conservative opposition, the EU decided last year that from 2010, every individual sheep and goat in Europe should be fitted with a tag. As the UK has one third of the continent’s entire sheep population, British farmers will be most severely affected: the annual cost could be £42 million. Conservative Agriculture Spokesman [Neil Parish MEP](#) said: “We will do all we can to ensure that the scheme can be introduced voluntarily and, and the specific situation in the UK can be taken into account. Of course if the UK Government had got more involved in the original discussions in the Council we would not have had this problem in the first place.”

Caution on Belarus

Debating a European Parliament [resolution on Belarus](#), Conservative Foreign Affairs spokesman [Charles Tannock MEP](#) has urged caution in the EU’s response to efforts by President Aleksandr Lukashenko to court the West. In a debate on the issue in October, Dr Tannock said: “We should always seek to challenge and engage with Belarus. The recent release of political prisoners therefore

presents us with an opportunity. Whether Lukashenko’s move constitutes an overture to the West remains to be seen, but we should be ready to respond with our own incentives to recognise and reward Belarus. Nevertheless, Belarus remains a country where human rights are routinely disregarded, political dissent is not tolerated and a free press is a distant dream. Once we have started dangling the carrot, we should also make sure we still have the stick in the other hand.”

New timeshare rules agreed

In October, MEPs approved new legislation to bolster the [rights of holidaymakers](#). The new law extends and updates consumer protection for an estimated 1.5 million people who are involved in timeshare and long-term holiday products (such as discount holiday clubs). For the first time, canal boats, caravans and cruise ships are also included. Conservative Internal Market Spokesman [Malcolm Harbour MEP](#) said: “Many people make significant investments in timeshare or holiday clubs, yet far too often they fall foul of mis-selling or poor information. This law will be good for consumers, and for the many legitimate timeshare and holiday club businesses in Europe.”

Concern over airport body scanners

In October, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the impact of new airport security measures – specifically body scanners - on human rights, privacy and personal dignity. Conservative Justice and Home Affairs Spokesman, [Philip Bradbourn MEP](#), said: “There may be some benefit in having body scanners in our airports, but they should be a last resort and a substitution for a strip search, not a random sample of innocent holiday-makers. Many travellers will consider these scanners an enormous intrusion. The European Commission is attempting to introduce these measures without consulting national governments or MEPs, and that is simply unacceptable.”

The European Parliament next meets in plenary on 17-20 November in Strasbourg. The [agenda](#) includes: The European Commission Work Programme for 2009, Common Agricultural Policy, Presentation of the Court of Auditors’ annual report, European Space Policy & defence procurement.