

## Conservative MEP Monthly Report – November 2008

### **Kirkhope elected Leader of MEPs**

[Timothy Kirkhope MEP](#) has been elected to lead the British Conservative MEPs - the largest British delegation in the European Parliament. Mr Kirkhope succeeds Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, who will stand down from the European Parliament next June.

Richard Ashworth MEP was elected as Deputy Leader of the delegation and Syed Kamall MEP was elected as Treasurer. The two elected members of the Conservative Delegation Bureau are David Sumberg MEP and Martin Callanan MEP. Mr Kirkhope has appointed Sir Robert Atkins MEP as Chief Whip.

Mr Kirkhope said: “It is a great honour to be elected to lead Conservative MEPs, and I look forward to building on the excellent work of my predecessor. Conservative MEPs are working to deliver David Cameron's vision of a European Union that focuses on climate change, global poverty and competitiveness, but which also wants to see powers returned to national governments. Conservatives have a positive message for EU reform, so that it responds more effectively to the demands of our citizens without interfering in areas where no value is added. I look forward to taking our positive message to the electorate leading up to the European Parliament elections next June.”

### **Labour votes to end Working Time opt-out**

Labour MEPs have again defied British business leaders and even Gordon Brown to support plans to overturn the UK's long-standing exemption from the [Working Time Directive](#). Because of the opt-out, around three million workers have chosen not to restrict their working week to the 48-hour limit set by the directive. But Labour MEPs were among a majority on the European Parliament's Employment Committee who voted in early November to scrap Britain's exemption from the law. A vote of the full Parliament is

expected in December. A majority of 60% of MEPs will be required to scrap the opt-out in what is expected to be a close vote.

Conservative Employment Spokesman [Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP](#) said: “British workers and businesses both want the opt-out to remain, yet Labour MEPs continue to undermine it. The British Government must not let workers down at a time when they want to work a few extra hours to make ends meet. During a recession we should be encouraging hard work, not outlawing it, and enabling personal choice rather than restricting it.” John Cridland, Deputy Director-General of the CBI, said: “We think people can look at their own circumstances and decide if they want to work longer hours. We call this common sense, and it doesn't need amending by Brussels.”

### **Governments called to account**

Following publication of the [European Court of Auditors Annual Report](#), Conservative Budgetary Control spokesman in Brussels, [James Elles MEP](#), said the ongoing inability for national governments to take urgent and rigorous action to achieve a clean opinion from the Court of Auditors is unacceptable. He called on the European Commission to 'name and shame' those countries failing to live up to their commitments. This year, for the first time, the Court was able to provide an unqualified opinion of the consolidated accounts, saying that they give a fair representation of the financial position of the EC. The court also gave a clear opinion on the legality and regularity of the EU's administration. However, around 80 percent of all EU monies are spent by national governments and agencies, where the auditors are unable to account for it. Mr Elles said: “This annual debacle is unacceptable and while EU governments know the action they must take to help end it, only a few have done so.”

### **Conservative alliance with UUP**

The Conservative Party and the Ulster Unionist Party have agreed a new alliance under which they will also run on a joint ticket in European and Westminster elections in Northern Ireland. UUP MEP [Jim Nicholson](#), who has sat with the Conservative MEP Delegation since 1999, will be the candidate for the European election and, if elected, will sit as a full member of the Conservative Delegation. He said: "We want greater co-operation with mainland UK. It is good that a party from Northern Ireland is able to work with a party who hopefully in the longer-term will be a party in government in the UK as a whole." [David Cameron](#) said: "For too long Northern Ireland has been outside of the mainstream of politics in the UK. This new political force will help change that, and allow everyone in Northern Ireland to participate fully in political life both in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom."

### **EU farm reforms far too timid**

Conservative Agriculture Spokesman [Neil Parish MEP](#) has said that a recent deal on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a step in the right direction, but is too timid and still leaves British farmers at a significant disadvantage compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. The so-called '[CAP Health Check](#)' was initially intended to break the link between production and subsidy fully and to move farmers further towards a free market in agriculture, whilst continuing to support rural development. However, the deal reached will mean that some important elements will probably have to wait until at least 2013.

Mr Parish said: "The EU took baby steps towards CAP reform, but we did not achieve the large leap we had hoped for. "Britain sent five ministers to this meeting, yet when the crucial negotiations were ongoing earlier this year, not a single British Minister was present. Britain has been the empty chair in the room when it came to farm reform, and part of the blame for the timidity of the Health Check falls to our Government. British farmers will still lose out to their counterparts across the Channel, who will receive a larger subsidy. This makes a farce of the principle that farmers operate on a level playing field in the single market."

### **Labour's war on cross-Channel shoppers**

The European Parliament has voted to reverse a 2005 decision to scrap the indicative limit on the amount of tobacco and alcohol that can be brought into the UK from within the EU. The limits were often misinterpreted as mandatory in the UK - which led to innocent consumers having thousands of pounds worth of goods seized and even vehicles crushed. Amendments tabled by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament - and supported by British Labour and Liberal Democrat MEPs - called for the guidelines to be reinstated and were adopted by a wafer-thin majority of 315 votes to 310. [John Purvis MEP](#), Conservative Vice-Chairman of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee said: "Labour's war on the single market rights of British consumers has not abated. Labour MEPs claim they want a single market, yet only in areas where the government does not receive significant revenue."

### **Call for Ugandan terrorist to face ICC**

Conservative MEPs are leading calls in the European Parliament for Uganda to resume its efforts to bring Joseph Kony to the International Criminal Court. The ICC issued an [arrest warrant](#) for Mr Kony - the Commander-in-Chief of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) - in September 2005. He stands accused of 33 counts of alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes. The LRA was responsible for countless human rights violations, abduction of children and forced conscription of child soldiers in Uganda. A [resolution](#), authored by Conservative Development Spokesman [Nirj Deva MEP](#) that was critical of Uganda's halting of efforts to capture Mr Kony was passed by a large majority. Mr Deva said: "Peace and reconciliation cannot be achieved for the LRA's victims until Mr Kony stands in the dock and answers these allegations. The Ugandan government and other governments in the region must step up their efforts to capture and deliver him to the ICC."

**The European Parliament next meets in plenary on 3-4 December in Brussels.** The [agenda](#) includes: The EU Summit (11-12 December), the EU economic recovery plan, the EU Small Business Act, and the climate change and energy package. There is also a formal address by the Dalai Lama.