

Conservative MEP Monthly Report – March 2009

Gordon Brown visits Strasbourg

Prime Minister Gordon Brown addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg at the end of March, having taken the extraordinary step of writing to the President of Parliament to ask to be invited to do so! [Timothy Kirkhope](#), Leader of the Conservative MEPs, wrote to Mr Brown ahead of his visit to warn that European politicians would be unlikely to heed his economic advice because in January, the European Commission had forecast that the UK economy will contract by one percent above the EU average. In addition, the IMF had predicted that Britain's recession will be deeper and longer than in most other parts of the world.

In his letter, Mr Kirkhope also raised the issue of European Parliament meetings in Strasbourg. Conservative MEPs have fought a long campaign for an end to the absurd practice whereby the European Parliament holds its meetings in both Strasbourg and Brussels. This can only change if EU Heads of Government agree and so far the British Government has refused to even raise the subject at EU Summit meetings. Mr Kirkhope said: "There is one simple but concrete action you could take at the European Council to show that the EU is serious about cutting down on its own waste: scrapping the European Parliament's two-seat operation. Such a proposal would save European taxpayers around £180 million annually and dramatically cut unnecessary CO2 emissions." Conservative MEPs staged a photo-call during Mr Brown's visit to highlight the Strasbourg issue.

During the debate with the Prime Minister, Conservative MEP [Daniel Hannan](#) spoke to highlight the Prime Minister's failings. His speech became the most watched political YouTube clip, with well over a million hits.

Victory for Valencian 'land-grab' victims

At the end of March, the European Parliament adopted a [report](#) that was highly critical of the so-called Valencian 'land grabs' which have led to the demolition of thousands of properties in Spain (many of them belonging to British expatriates) without compensation. In some cases, the

authorities have even charged the property owners for the installation of local infrastructure, after they have lost their property.

The report, which was adopted with 349 votes in favour, 110 against and 114 abstentions says Spain should "suspend and review" all the new urbanisation plans which do not respect the right to legitimate ownership and suggests that EU funding payments to Spain could be interrupted until the problem is solved. It also states that recourse and complaint procedures for victims of the 'land grab' are "outrageously slow" and that the sentences handed down in many cases are not enforced in a way which provides any satisfaction. The report calls for "adequate compensation" for those affected.

Conservative Spokesman on the issue, [Sir Robert Atkins MEP](#), said the report will send a powerful signal to the Spanish authorities. He, along with a number of other Conservative MEPs including Neil Parish and Roger Helmer, have been active in the campaign to end the scandal and secure justice for its victims. Sir Robert said: "We have heard from so many British citizens who were frankly victims of a scandal sanctioned by the Spanish authorities. The emotional and financial trauma so many home owners have suffered must be put right. The adoption of this report is an important step but our campaign will not rest until this unjust law has been overturned."

Reprieve for recreational anglers

Conservative pressure and amendments have won a reprieve for recreational anglers by dramatically watering-down efforts to bring them under the regulation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Proposed legislation from the European Commission would have required recreational fishermen to register their boats, and everything they caught would have been counted towards the permitted national fisheries quota under the CFP regime.

Conservative Fisheries Spokesman [Struan Stevenson MEP](#) led opposition to the plans. In a crucial vote in the Parliament's Fisheries

Committee in March, he succeeded in amending the proposal so that national governments will be able to decide for themselves whether or not to include recreational fishermen under the CFP. After the vote, Mr Stevenson said: "Recreational anglers who are simply catching fish for their own consumption will not now be affected. Only fishermen who target recovery stocks such as cod, hake, eel and bluefin tuna and seek to sell their catch will come under the jurisdiction of the CFP."

In a written response to Mr Stevenson, EU Fisheries Commissioner, Joe Borg, confirmed: "The normal hobby angler who catches an insignificant number of fish when he goes out fishing and uses it exclusively for his private consumption will not be covered...even if he catches fish like cod which is under a recovery plan." Richard Benyon MP, Shadow Fisheries Minister, said: "Recreational fishermen and the communities that benefit from the tourism they bring can have confidence that the vast majority will be excluded from this regulation. It is disappointing that despite all their rhetoric there were no amendments from UKIP opposing or seeking to change this measure. British anglers need politicians who will be effective in reining in some of the EU's more bizarre proposals."

EU-India Free Trade Deal backed

The European Parliament has sent a powerful signal in support of free trade by supporting an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the EU and India. Conservative MEP [Sajjad Karim](#) was the author of the European Parliament's [report](#) on the issue. He said: "Trade between India and the EU has more than doubled in the past decade but a free trade deal would cause an explosion of transactions between us. Socialist MEPs had attempted to invert this report towards one that would enshrine protectionism. Fortunately, we have overturned their position and sent a powerful signal that trade liberalisation is ultimately in all our interests."

NHS boilers saved

Conservative MEPs successfully amended new legislation on industrial pollution control so it will not force NHS hospitals to close down their boilers, as had been feared. However, the new rules still threaten bad news for farmers. Conservative MEP [Dr Caroline Jackson](#) was able to amend the [Directive on Industrial Emissions](#)

[Pollution Prevention and Control](#) after the NHS Confederation raised concerns that around 70 hospitals in the UK would face draconian costs for their boilers. She said: "NHS boilers should never have been put at risk by this Directive. The Commission is still failing to fully investigate the unintended consequences some of their proposals can have before bringing them forward." Conservative Agriculture Spokesman Neil Parish MEP warned: "This Directive is a mixed bag for Britain's poultry and pig farmers. They already comply with detailed European environmental law and their standards would put many other European producers to shame. To bring farmers into a law designed to scale back emissions from large industry is unacceptable."

Africa funding welcomed

Conservative International Development Spokesman [Nirj Deva MEP](#) has welcomed an [announcement](#) by the European Commission that it will allocate €247 million to humanitarian aid to Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Burundi, Tanzania, the Sahel region, Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe. But he warned: "We must be able to monitor precisely where this money goes. Many of these countries are in clear need of humanitarian aid but are also at risk of great corruption."

New rules for computer games

The European Parliament has voted in favour of new [proposals](#) to protect children playing computer games, including a provision that games consoles should have a 'red button' enabling parents to disable video games that contain inappropriate content for minors. Conservative Consumer Protection Spokesman [Malcolm Harbour MEP](#) said: "The computer games market has exploded over the last decade and has created the need for minors to be protected in much the same way as they are with films."

The European Parliament next meets in plenary on 21-24 April in Strasbourg. The [agenda](#) includes debates on the EU 2010 budget; a number of energy issues (such as energy security and internal markets in electricity and gas); the financial crisis and the conclusions of the G20 Summit; taxation; and deforestation.