

Report to Nottinghamshire constituents from Bill Newton Dunn MEP

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Two controversial pieces of EU legislation were decided in the European Parliament this week

1. Tobacco

MEPs decided, by majority, that health warnings on cigarette packets should cover 65% of the packet and be placed at the top not the bottom, also that menthols could continue for five years, and that electronic cigarettes should not require a prescription but should be sold freely. Snus (chewing tobacco) to remain only for sale in Sweden. But imitation tobacco products – like the popular liquorice pipes in Denmark – are to be banned which would be a mistake in my opinion. Why only 65% of the packet to be covered by a health warning ? Because, procedurally, the amendment for 55% was taken first and was defeated, then next came 65%, then 75% afterwards if 65% were defeated. If 65% was defeated, it was felt likely that the 75% would also be lost and we would end up with the present which is what the tobacco companies want. So, a majority voted for 65%. I had wanted 75% but it was not to be.

The pro-tobacco lobby had hoped that the whole measure would be delayed so that it would die when the parliament dissolves next April for the next European elections.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131004IPR21539/html/Tobacco-larger-warnings-flavours-banned-e-cigarettes-regulated>

The final stage is for a common text for the new law to be agreed between the EU's two legislative chambers (Parliament and the council of Ministers). For more details see

2. Flying hours for pilots.

There was a big controversy about aircraft safety and flying hours for cabin crew. It was coloured by the presence in the parliament of many pilots wearing their airline uniforms and gold braid.

The dilemma was that there are at present 28 different sets of national rules about what the safety rules are for flying commercial aircraft. The major flag-carriers have high standards but some low-cost and charter airlines are less scrupulous.

Therefore EASA (the EU's Air Safety Agency) proposed a set of minimum safety standards for all airlines flying in Europe. Which seemed to me a valuable proposal.

However, some British pilots cabin crew had strong objections, because the new European minima might allow their employers to lower standards for UK airlines. The EASA proposal would allow the UK to legislate for the higher standards, but our government has only come out in support of the EASA minimum.

I listened to both the pilots and to EASA, and decided in the end to support our pilots because I do not want to allow dumbing-down of safety standards for people in the East Midlands.

If the EASA proposal were to be rejected by a majority of MEPs, then Europe would continue with its 28 different sets of national rules. The result was going to be close. During Tuesday night, an email was circulated at 3.30am that EASA had made a concession to the pilots. In the chamber on Wednesday, a procedural attempt to delay the vote to allow for further negotiations was narrowly defeated, by 327-299. The final vote followed immediately and the new EASA safety rules were approved by 387 to 218 with 66 abstentions.

For more details, see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131007IPR21623/html/Parliament-votes-not-to-oppose-Commission-measures-on-flight-time-limitations>

continued....

Other important matters

- **The new United Nations report on Climate change** was published. It says that "Sea-levels are not only rising but are accelerating, due to thermal expansion of the oceans and to the melting of the glaciers" and that there is "90% confidence that the warming of our planet is at least in part due to human activity". The good news is that China is actively cooperating in the cutbacks but that not enough is being attempted by India.
- **Capping of bankers' bonuses was agreed by the EU but the UK government is trying to stop** or to delay it by challenging it in the European Court of Justice. Why are they doing that? Maybe the Conservatives are conscious that European (2014) and General (2015) elections are approaching and financial support from the City would be welcome.
- **the Sakharov Prize is Europe's premier human rights prize is awarded each year** by the European Parliament. Previous winners include Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Alexander Dubcek, and other great campaigners.
This year's short-list of three candidates was controversial : 1. Malala (the young Pakistani girl who was shot by the Taliban for supporting education for women) : 2. Edward Snowden (who leaked the news about the USA's secret surveillance system Prism) : 3. a Belarussian dissident group. The final choice was made by a meeting of party leaders, Malala is the winner and will receive her prize in Strasbourg later this year.
- **an Anti-trust action has been started by the EU against Google**, using Article 102 of EU treaty in order to improve choice for consumers in the EU. Commissioner Almunia has "concerns" which include patents, Android, Search, use of content used by others, and online advertisements. He is negotiating with Google, and is considering "an improved proposal from Google". The formal EU decision by the Commission may be made next spring. The Commission can impose a massive fine : earlier this year a 500 million euro fine was imposed on Microsoft.

Nissan warns against referendum vote to leave EU

Nissan has urged Britain not to leave the European Union, warning that an exit could create obstacles to foreign investment in automotive manufacturing. The Japanese car maker, has recently pumped £125 million into expanding Britain's biggest car factory in Sunderland. Toshiyuki Shiga, Nissan's chief operating officer, expressed caution about a referendum on EU membership, saying an "out" vote could lead to costly changes in tariffs, duties, regulations and taxes. "The UK is part of the European Union — that's very important," said Mr Shiga, who is second-in-command to Carlos Ghosn, Nissan's chief executive. "From the foreign investor's point of view, I hope that the UK will remain an EU member." Meanwhile, Gerry Grimstone, chairman of TheCityUK, a lobby group for U.K. financial-services firms, has said: "I do not believe the city's pre-eminent position will survive if we lose our role as Europe's financial capital. I don't believe we can maintain that position if we are not part of the single market."

Finally...

Berlusconi in Italy, down but not totally out.

Last week he ordered his party's five cabinet ministers to resign from Italy's coalition government in order to try to collapse the government, so that he could avoid the Senate in Rome carrying through its vote to expel him from politics and thus force him to serve his sentence for tax evasion. (He would escape prison because he is over 75, so faced either house-arrest or performing public service for a year instead). Last year he successfully collapsed the Monte technocratic government for the same reason.

If he succeeded in collapsing Italy's government, there would have to be a new General Election, Berlusconi would stand again and attempt to "bribe" voters with promises to repay some of their taxes to them, as he did earlier this year, and he would regain his parliamentary immunity and escape punishment. If he lost the election, he could still cause chaos in Italy

because he owns the big political party on the right and would argue that he should be pardoned so that Italy could escape from chaotic deadlock.

However, to his surprise, his own cabinet ministers abandoned him and stayed in their government posts. The Senate then expelled him and he has asked to do a year of public service among HIV sufferers. But he is still a billionaire and still payrolls the main centre-right political party, so Italy has not necessarily seen the end of him.

I wonder if this is an aspect of changing politics ? Is it so that in the modern world people prefer "stars" to be their leaders, rather than supporting a party for better for worse. Memberships of all parties in the free world are falling, and in China too. Instead some people flock towards an attractive star - eg a Ghandi in India, or Obama, or Berlusconi. In the UK, might that be the future attraction of Boris Johnson (though he would be a poor leader, in my opinion) ?

All the best

Bill Newton Dunn