

Here is what has happened in the European Parliament this week. (received 19 Mar 2013)

Common Agricultural Policy - changes

The major event was voting the First Reading of the reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy which had been proposed by the Commission..

A torrent of emails with advice arrived from voters - in the thousands - for which I am grateful because it shows the strength of feelings.

For those who want to study the details of our voting, here is the official summary issued by the parliament afterwards.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130308IPR06301/html/New-EU-farm-policy-greener-fairer-and-better-able-to-deliver-food-security>

But this is only our First Reading. Next come the proposals from the Council of 27 national Agriculture ministers. Then, if they do not agree with MEPs, comes our Second Reading. The CAP, almost everybody agrees, is in need of reform. The Lisbon Treaty gave MEPs, for the first time, equal powers with national ministers, to decide the future rules. With many interests represented from all corners of Europe, 8,000 amendments were tabled to the proposals in the parliament's Agriculture Committee. The committee reduced them down to five hundred and sent them to the full parliament - which meant a long voting session yesterday - and, horrifyingly, after two and a half hours, the Greek vice-president MEP who was presiding in the Speaker's chair, had a massive stroke and is now under intensive care in hospital.

Longterm financing of the EU

The other major decision was how to react to the Leaders' seven year plans for the EU Budget. Most MEPs, including me, are highly critical of the 27 national leaders' piece-meal attempts over thirty hours in Brussels two weeks ago to cobble together arbitrary cuts - whereas the EU budget should mean savings because it stops 27 national governments each doing things separately twenty-seven times over.

This week we voted a mandate for a team of MEPs to negotiate with the Leaders with proposals how to improve their piece-meal ideas.

The details are here :

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130312IPR06440/html/Long-term-EU-budget-negotiations-EP-sets-out-its-stance>

After the negotiations, our team will report back to the full parliament - and then we shall vote on whether to accept the changes accepted by the 27 Leaders or to reject their package and instead to allow the EU to work on a normal annual budget, as happens just about everywhere else in the world.

Election Dates in 2014

The date of the European elections in 2014 will probably be in late May and on the same day as the local elections.

Bad situation in Hungary.

The right.wing government has made further restrictive changes to the country's Constitution - which is already causing unrest in the streets of Budapest.

The definition of "family" has been narrowed, the independence of the judiciary is limited, election campaigning by opponents is made more difficult, students who have state grants can not leave the country for five years, and it becomes a crime to sleep in the street.

Chaotic political situation in Italy

There is deadlock following the recent general election. The first required step is agreement who will preside over their two chambers - by convention it is members from different parties (Senate, and Camera) but there is no agreement on either and Grillo the clown whose new party scored 25% says they were not elected to compromise with anybody. In one month the country's president stands down at the end of his seven-year term, and a new one has to be chosen by parliament but so far there is no operating parliament. Monti remains the caretaker prime minister. It already begins to look like another general election in the autumn.

My cyber-twin

On my website - www.newton-dunn.com - I continue to programme new answers to questions from visitors into my "cyber-twin". Try asking it a question!

All the best, Bill