

My final report of 2013 from the European Parliament.

The European Parliament is busy finishing its work - because a new parliament will be elected in May 2014. After that, in June or July, a new president of the Commission will be elected, a new set of 28 Commissioners will be proposed, one from each member state, and then each candidate Commissioner will be interrogated by MEPs and if approved voted into office for five years. So, a lot of change in the EU during 2014.

Syria. My Development committee heard a stark warning about the growing crisis Syria is growing into an extraordinary crisis because the rest of the world can not achieve sufficient pressure to persuade the fighting groups to stop. There is increasing radicalization among the 1,200 fighting groups, some with foreign fighters from Europe, Africa and Al Q'aida. Hundreds of thousands of dead Syrians. 9.3 million Syrians now needing aid from outside. 6.3 million displaced from their homes, and living in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey. 250,000 in besieged communities inside Syria which can not be reached. Winter has started and is harsh.

Need for Humanitarian assistance is growing but the fighting is growing faster. The UN has issued its largest ever appeal for funding. Aid is less effective than it should be because the fighting groups are not willing to cooperate. Hopes are pinned on Peace talks which are scheduled to start on 22 January in Geneva but there is a lot of scepticism about any positive outcome. Will the 1.200 groups pay any attention to any result ? When will they all understand that no military victory is possible. Before then, the crisis will continue to grow. If there is no peace, either radicalisation will increase and the refugee flow to Europe will increase, many in leaky boats which will sink.

If the Syrian crisis remains unsolved, there will be a lost generation of children, who may become radicalized, they are seeing terrible things, are without education and disease is breaking out. There could be an explosion in the Middle East which, as our neighbour, could have horrifying consequences for Europe. It is morally right for us to try to help them but it is also in our own interest.

The new sustainable EU fisheries policy from 2014

See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131206IPR30075/html/Green-light-for-new-sustainable-EU-fisheries-policy-from-2014>

Deep-sea fishing

Proposals for a ban on deep sea trawling in the North East Atlantic were rejected in the parliament. Scientists have warned that trawlers which scrape the bottom of the sea-bed do longterm damage, taking decades to recover and that the amount of fish caught is very small. I voted for the ban but pro-fishing MEPs from different countries including the UK combined to defeat it narrowly by 342 to 326.

See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131206IPR30022/html/Deep-sea-fisheries-Parliament-calls-for-bottom-trawling-ban-in-vulnerable-areas>

Work in progress

State of Free Trade Agreements currently under negotiation :

1. Between the EU and the USA - known as "TTIP" (Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership) - under negotiation but with major obstacles on both sides. Obama wants it before his presidency ends
2. between the EU and India : no prospect of progress until after the next Indian federal elections in May 2014

Progress on the Tobacco Products Directive

The two legislative chambers, Parliament and Council, are edging closer to a compromise on the terms of the new law. The main issues which are agreed are :

- 65% of the packets must carry combined pictures and text health warnings.
- Menthol flavours will phased out in summer 2020.
- Slims will not be banned.
- The minimum amount of cigarettes per pack is 20.
- No ban on tobacco imitation products but Member States can adopt more stringent national measures, including on imitation products (important for Danes and Swedes).
- The minimum content for roll-your own tobacco to be 30 grams (important for the Irish).
- Snus (mouth tobacco) will be up to the only state using it, Sweden, to decide how it can legally be put on the market (important for Swedish native languages).
- Transposition time into national law-books will be 2 years after entry into force.

The remaining problem to crack is electronic cigarettes. Commission and Council want e-cigarettes to be subject to pharmaceutical controls. The parliament (except the socialists) wants to make e-cigarettes at least as available on the market as tobacco product so as to allow smokers a less harmful alternative to smoking.

Goldman Sachs. Jobs to be lost if the UK were to vote to leave the EU.

Goldman Sachs, which employs 6,000 people in the UK, has warned that quitting the EU would threaten London's status as Europe's financial centre and that it could cause them to transfer a substantial part of their European business elsewhere. Their co-CEO, Michael Sherwood, said last week his company would be likely to 'drastically reduce' its activities in London in case of an EU exit. Speaking to the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, he warned: "In all likelihood we would transfer a substantial part of our European business from London to a Eurozone location – the most obvious contenders being Paris and Frankfurt." Goldman Sachs currently employs around 5,500 people in London compared to just 200 in Frankfurt.

How does (and did) your MEP vote ?

VoteWatch.eu is an independent website which contains a database of all European Parliament roll call votes since the 2009 elections. It also gives voting trends, and the EP's calendar of future meetings.

With the European elections approaching in May, another independent website has appeared - unproven so far - called europedecides.eu.

Finally, my warmest Seasonal Greetings to you.

On Friday this week (20 December), the European Parliament stops work and it will resume Monday 6th January. My next report will be sent in mid-January.

Bill Newton Dunn