

## **Report from our MEP, Bill Newton Dunn (received 23 May 2013)**

Another report from the European Parliament, where many topics are bubbling.

### ***What are Electronic Cigarettes?***

The original Commission proposal was to regulate anything with a substantial nicotine content (enough to actually have an effect) as "medicinal products", for which getting approval would be costly and slow. The proposal allows e-cigs (or 'nicotine containing products') which contain nicotine under a low threshold to be sold as consumer products. People in favour of medicinal regulation argue that we don't know what are the long term effects of inhaling nicotine vapours, and that they could potentially be dangerous. Those on the other side say that, yes they should be regulated in some way to ensure that they are safe as general products, but that they are many times less dangerous than tobacco, do not cause cancer, and are not meant to act as medicines, and should not be regulated as such.

The parliament's Environment committee has not yet taken a final position. Liberal MEPs say that if the e-cig manufacturers make a health claim and say the electronic cigarettes can get you to quit smoking, then they have to be regulated as medicines. If not, they are only obliged to comply with existing EU consumer legislation, and include warnings that health may be damaged, and implement age restrictions. The Commission would be obliged to do an in-depth study on the long term effects of these products and, if necessary, propose separate legislation in future. The debate in the committee continues.

### ***Future EU finances, known as "MFF"***

In February, a deal about the Multilateral Future Financing for the EU was cobbled together by the 27 leaders in secret over thirty hours in Brussels. It was a very bad deal (cutting back on money-saving programmes such as fighting crime and also proposing to run the EU into deep debt). The parliament - which shares exact responsibility with the leaders for the EU finances - was not consulted. In March, MEPs pointed out the many defects of the deal and made responsible alternative proposals. It is a joint decision between parliament and the leaders. But no compromise between the two sides is in sight because the national leaders are, so far, proving incapable of presenting a united front together for the negotiations. The consequence, if there is no early solution, may be that EU payments (for farming and for the regions) will be delayed.

### ***Reform of the Fishing policy - slow progress***

Last week, the 27 national Fishery ministers agreed a 'final' negotiating mandate for the Irish (who currently chair meetings of the Council of Ministers) to negotiate with the European Parliament.

The Council has moved towards the Parliament's already decided position for promoting a more sustainable approach to fisheries policy, and reducing discards to 5% of catch after 3 years. But it is not yet clear whether Ministers have accepted that aspirations to rebuild fish stocks have to be turned into legally binding commitments.

The Irish Presidency stated that "no further movement can be expected from the Council, while on the other hand that there are no illusions as to the challenges facing us with the European Parliament."

### ***Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy***

No progress, because the 27 national Agriculture ministers can not agree together on how to negotiate with the parliament, which took its position many weeks ago.

### ***Storm in an Olive Oil cup***

There was a noisy storm in a tea-cup this week when the Commission announced, using powers delegated to them by the parliament and Council, and after extensive fraud in the Olive Oil market, new rules to address the issue of honest labelling, compliance controls and to extend the scope to restaurants and bars. Their proposed amendments include the requirement that the catering industry should "be obliged to use oil bottles equipped with an opening system which cannot be resealed after the first time it is opened, together with a protection system preventing them from being reused once the contents indicated on the label have been finished". The new rules would only apply to 100% olive oils, and not mixed dressings or other condiments - and only apply to front-of-house service (ie. on the tables) not in kitchens.

However, feeling this was way-over-the-top bureaucracy, a cross-party MEP letter was sent to Commission President Barroso. This morning, the Commission withdrew their proposal !

### ***The hoped-for EU-USA Free Trade deal***

Negotiations will start in July between the two sides of the Atlantic. This week MEPs set out their wishes for what it might contain. I can provide the details if you ask.

### ***Sir Humphreys visit the European Parliament***

In the parliament this week, we had a visit from a team of high-powered "Sir Humphreys" from different Whitehall departments. They said they want to "increase their engagement with the parliament." Not what euro-sceptics want to hear.

### ***Tibet - how we could protest***

This week I listened to an account of the situation in Tibet, given by the Dalai Lama's representative in Brussels, Mr Ngodup Dorjee. He said it is now "very grave". Increasing numbers of self-immolations, no freedom of expression, photos of Chinese leaders having to be displayed inside Tibetan monasteries, the Chinese now the majority population in most Tibetan towns, Mandarin now the official language, nomads rounded up and forced to live in towns. China's motive is the vast minerals and the fresh water available in Tibet.

But there is something new and potentially powerful which you and I could do to show our support for the Tibetans. A French village (Salles Sur Garonne) decided to show its support and twinned itself with a Tibetan village. All that was required was a resolution by the local council and the money to pay for a sign at the entrance to the French village. Already fifty French towns and villages have followed this example. There is a now website called [www.parrainages-villes-Tibet.org](http://www.parrainages-villes-Tibet.org) (soon to be also in English) with advice on how to do it and advice on how to choose a Tibetan village. The young French mayor, Jean Louis Halioua, speaks English and gave me his card. He is keen to see similar twinning examples in other EU countries. So why don't we set up some twinings with Tibetan villages to show our support in the East Midlands and our disgust at the Chinese treatment of them ? A Tibetan could be invited to give a talk about the situation. By raising awareness, this might lead to an economic boycott of Chinese-manufactured goods, and might have an effect on their leaders in Beijing.

### ***Finally....would you like "a Suspended Coffee", a name which you might find it useful ?***

It derives from Naples after World War two when there was great poverty. Wealthier citizens of Naples in a coffee bar ordered "un caffe e un caffe sospeso". This meant they wanted one for themselves and they also paid for one for any later customer who came in

but could not afford to pay. I am told there is now a Facebook page about this and that the habit is spreading across Europe including in the UK. So, if you feel hard up, try asking for "a suspended coffee, please" and see what the bartender's reaction is !

**All the best, Bill**