

## **Bill Newton Dunn's February 2013 Report from the European Parliament**

**Mr Hollande, President of France**, took part in a two and a half hour public debate in our chamber about the future of Europe.

He said "The EU must have its own tax revenue...such as a Financial Transaction Tax created through "enhanced cooperation" by willing states", ie bypassing unwilling states like the UK. Asked about the parliament having to go to Strasbourg, he insisted that "Strasbourg is Europe...it symbolises reconciliation between France and Germany." France has a veto, supported by the UK, so there seems no early chance of change to the endless trek for MEPs between Brussels and Strasbourg each month. Official figures show the extra cost of 48 days in Strasbourg per year, as well as maintaining the EP's secretariat in Luxembourg, costs an additional €180m per year, and that the extra annual environmental cost is 19,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

A contrast was drawn by some between Hollande's public debate with Cameron's recent speech about the future of Europe which was delivered without debate in the basement of the Bloomberg news agency in London.

### **Reform of the Fisheries rules**

MEPs completed our First Reading for reform of the rules for Fishing, by 502 to 137 votes - which includes abolition of compulsory discards of dead fish. Next, our proposals have to be agreed with the 27 national Fishery ministers. The big majority puts the parliament in a strong negotiating position with the Council of Ministers. The Irish Presidency of the Council has made clear that it wants to complete the reform by June.

This was the first time that MEPs have had the legal powers to make the changes. Previously the national ministers have horse-traded deals privately among themselves. But the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the parliament and gave MEPs the right of democratic control over ministers.

One long-term problem will remain. There is no punishment for member states that allow cheating by their fishermen. National governments will be on their honour to enforce the rules - but will they ? Even the UK cheated in the past.

For details see,

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130201IPR05571/html/Stop-overfishing-MEPs-vote-for-ambitious-reform>

### **Toning down traffic noise and helping visually-handicapped pedestrians**

The First Reading was approved for an EU law to tighten noise limits for cars and MEPs also recommended introducing labels to inform consumers about new cars' noise levels and to add sound to hybrid and electric vehicles to alert pedestrians.

See

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130201IPR05572/html/Parliament-backs-law-to-tone-down-harmful-traffic-noise>

### **Subsidies for tobacco farming in Greece and Bulgaria?**

Last Sunday's newspapers reported sweepingly that "MEPs had voted for subsidies for tobacco farming in Greece and Bulgaria." Actually, the vote was only in the parliament's Agriculture committee, and not unanimous since Brits voted against. Next the committee's proposals will be debated and perhaps rejected by the full parliament in March, and also may be rejected by the other chamber, the Council of Ministers.

### **Funding of xenophobic political parties**

Many people emailed me about this. No decision has yet been taken by the President of parliament. Strong messages have been given to him by the main political groups in the

parliament to find a way to stop funding of far-right political parties such as the BNP.

Today (Thursday) and tomorrow, the 27 national leaders including Cameron are in Brussels to try again to agree on a seven-year plan for the EU budget. (Neither the USSR or China ever made seven-year plans, so why are our leaders trying ?)

It seems that the leaders may try to find a compromise by cutting the immediate annual EU budget, but in order to buy the acquiescence of poorer EU member states they may boost future promises to them but without the money to pay those future bills - so creating a future financial problem for tax-payers estimated today at 70 billions of euros.

The European budget represents only 1% of GNI (gross national income) of the EU and barely 2.5% of public expenditure of the 27 member states together. (Contrast the EU's one per cent with the federal US budget which is 23%). Everybody understands the need for budgetary rigour - especially in times of financial crisis - but economies of scale are offered by the EU budget in certain areas to avoid wasteful duplication by the 27 national capitals. Member State governments should recognise that pooling efforts can result in savings back home and added value at EU level - such as cooperation over fighting crime through EuroPol, training the young generations who are critical for our future, research for medicine and diseases, Space research, and enforcement of Single Market rules where states ignore them.

If the leaders again fail to agree, it may mean reverting to ordinary annual budgets. Those are decided by majority voting in both chambers. MEPs could delete the UK's rebate, so Cameron had better reach a compromise this week.

For details of the parliament's debate, see

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130204IPR05618/html/Budget-2014-2020-Don't-sacrifice-EU's-future-to-the-current-crisis-say-MEPs>

**Big arguments about new European legislation** which are coming shortly will be about

- Reform of the Agricultural Policy next month
- Labelling of Tobacco products (should packets have anything at all on them except health warnings ?)
- Data Privacy (how much protection should the individual have and how much right should governments have to know about us ?).

Finally,

Anybody who visits my website can try out an new innovation. I have installed a "cybertwin" interface on the home-page of the website - where a visitor can type in any question and receive an immediate answer from me. It isn't perfect yet because I still have to programme it with more answers. Suggestions for Questions and Answers would be welcome.

All the best, Bill