

MEP July 2013 Report

Here is my last report of the "summer" from the parliament before it breaks for the holidays.

TTIP - the hoped-for Free Trade treaty between the EU and the USA

Negotiations will start next week in Washington despite the "Prism" scandal. The need for an EU-US free trade treaty is a consequence of the failure of the world free trade talks which were known as "Doha".

Last week in Brussels, I discussed TTIP with a visiting Democrat Congressman during a dinner. The goal is more jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. The American negotiator was at Harvard with Obama so the President attaches a high priority to the negotiations. Congress will give "Fast Track" approval, which means they agree not to intervene in the details for a defined period while negotiations proceed. The European Parliament, (which must ratify the treaty for Europe) agreed to the same condition. "Neither side must be said to have lost. There will be rough spots – like the farmers and subsidies for food production and GMOs, but maybe the answer will be better labelling so that consumers can choose." About "Prism" the congressman said "Nobody wants to compromise on privacy for individuals...but we don't realise how vulnerable we are...the other day North Korea came within moments of closing down South Korea's whole financial system...On Prism, it is clear that America has some explaining to do." Other countries are asking to be included in the negotiations. On Europe's side are Turkey, Norway and Switzerland. Canada and Mexico want to be alongside the USA. A USA-Asia free trade negotiation is also underway. The EU-India free trade agreement has stalled.

Prism

A debate was held and the parliament voted a resolution – not to delay the TTIP talks but to set up a special urgent inquiry including all the national parliaments which must report back before the end of this year.

Croatia joined the EU, as its 28th member, on 1st July.

Lithuania takes over from Ireland the chairing of meetings of the Council of Ministers (the other chamber) until December.

Latvia will adopt the Euro as its currency from 1st January 2014.

Hungary

A fierce debate was held about the deteriorating human rights situation in Hungary. Their Prime Minister flew from Budapest to take part. For details, see this link

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130701IPR14768/html/Hungary-must-abide-by-EU-values-say-MEPs>

In summary, the Venice Commission of the wider Council of Europe has confirmed that the fourth amendment of the Hungarian Constitution contradicts European fundamental law and standards. Article 7(1) of the EU Treaty would allow the other EU governments to suspend Hungary's right to vote in the Council of Ministers until it amended its basic constitution. We should learn from our mistakes of the past. If today we turn a blind eye to a violation of fundamental rights in the EU we could find ourselves faced with dire consequences in the long run, as in the 1930s.

A **new EU Ombudsman** was elected by MEPs. The winner, from six candidates, is Emily O'Reilly who was previously Irish Ombudsman (or "woman" ?) since 2003. Her job, starting in October, is to correct examples of mal-administration within EU bodies.

Roaming charges for mobile phone users were compulsorily reduced again, from 1st July. Next year, we hope they will be abolished altogether.

Future financing of the EU, known as “MFF”

The fight between Parliament and Council about the future EU budget is nearing its end. This week the parliament provisionally gave approval to a possible compromise with the national leaders but laid down conditions before any deal can be agreed in the autumn :

- full agreement on the outstanding policy files to be agreed by co-decision including Agriculture;
- no carry over of debt : the Council must adopt an amending budget to ensure that the 2013 outstanding payments claims are covered.
- the importance of the compulsory revision dealing with both revenue and expenditure must be entirely binding;
- additional funding must be made available for the digital Europe agenda;
- a High Level group on the EU's future own financial resources must be convened at the same time as the adoption of this financial "MFF" regulation

Motorcycles and Caravans

MEPs voted, by 354 to 322, to include powered two wheelers (PTWs) into the proposals for periodical technical inspections (PTI), then voted to with-hold the final decision about motorcycles and caravans until an agreement is negotiated with the Council.

Finally.

Parliament goes on holiday at the end of next week. So this is my last report until MEPs get back to work at the end of August. Let's hope the sun shines soon on everybody.

All the best

Bill Newton Dunn