

Bill Newton Dunn's June Report from the European Parliament (June 13th)

Croatia the 28th member of the EU from 1st July

There will be a Transition period while they adapt to the full set of EU laws. (We had a five year Transition period after we joined in 1973).

They get a new Commissioner : his name is Mr Mimica and his responsibility will be Consumer Affairs. He underwent a hearing by a parliamentary committee and received endorsement this week from the parliament.

The Irish six-month presidency of the other chamber, the Council of Ministers, finishes at the end of June. They have been enthusiastic, positive and very active.

From July, for six months, the Lithuanians take over chairing of Council meetings.

Organised Crime

The committee produced an Interim report which was debated this week. There is a link to a summary (which I find very inadequate) at

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130607IPR11353/html/Stepping-up-the-fight-against-mafia-style-crime-in-the-EU>

The final report of the committee will follow in October.

The parliament's summary omits that hundreds of billions of pounds worth of taxes are lost every year across Europe due to organised crime, as well as millions of legitimate jobs which have been taken out of the grasp of hard-working citizens. Fraud, counterfeiting, smuggling and cyber-crime are all having a drastic impact on the economy and are undermining efforts to promote jobs and growth. Britain is particularly affected, with half of EuroPol's investigations into organised crime having links to the UK.

Organised criminals conduct complex operations across borders and make use of the internet to commit crimes which individual law enforcement bodies find it very hard to detect. Shockingly, a maximum of 5% of all containers entering Europe by road, rail, sea or air are ever checked at the borders. This makes it remarkably easy for criminals to smuggle in whatever they choose. The result is that jobs and taxes are lost while organised criminals are lining their pockets at a time of economic crisis.

We need sharing of sovereignty and law enforcement resources between by the 27 national governments to tackle this problem together and successfully. The fight against organised crime is an area where European cooperation is not just useful, but is indispensable.

Remarkably though, Conservative MEPs voted against many parts of the report and chose to side instead with UKIP in opposing European cooperation against organised crime. The Tories were once known as the party of law and order, but they are now allowing their euroscepticism and fear of UKIP to get in the way of effective policing.

Negotiations between MEPs and the Council about the future financing of Europe.

Finally, the other chamber, the Council of Ministers, is showing some flexibility over negotiations to change the late-night deal made in February between the 27 national leaders. But the Council are only agreeing to redeploying of funds within the deal made by the 27 leaders.

Council is still unwilling to pay for the commitments which it has made previously, not least to assist Croatia when it joins the EU in two weeks. There was another long negotiation on Tuesday evening between a team from the parliament's Budget committee and a Council team led by the Irish.

The Irish insist they have shown flexibility on behalf of the 27 governments and that they recognise that the parliament shares an equal responsibility for EU finances. But the struggle between the two chambers for a sensible realistic EU budget continues.

Turkey - watch developments

The rioting in Istanbul is significant for us. Turkey is Europe's neighbour and is the bridge between East and West. It is a candidate to join the EU. Superficially, the rioting in Istanbul is

about plans for redevelopment of a public park. But the protests by the young Turkish generation goes much deeper. It is about the choice between freedom or authority in Turkey. (According to Reporters without Borders, it is ranked 154 in the world - just three places above the last dictatorship in Europe – Belarus).

Turkey has two main political parties : one is pro-western and the other is pro-Islam. The prime minister Erdogan has been in power for ten years. He has been keeping the balance between western-style freedom and Islamic religious authoritarianism. But, doing so, there are now more journalists in prison in Turkey than there are in prison in China.

Turkish youth is fed up because they feel progress to freedom is receding.

What happens in Turkey is deeply significant for us. Britain is changing fast too : the average age of Conservative party members is now 74 and their past authoritarian attitude of "we know best, trust us" is out-of-date. Right-wing Conservative MPs protest against the new freedoms provided by membership of the EU : they want a return to walls around Britain so they can be in control. The typical supporter of UKIP, according to opinion pollsters, is a middle-aged frustrated male who longs for a return to the past.

But we all know that the world is changing fast and internet technology with it. In China, in Arab countries, in Turkey, and in Britain we can not escape the changes. Our choice is to accept change and enjoy it and take advantage of it, or try to resist it and be left behind. That is why I am glad to be a pro-European Liberal. I am against traditional authoritarianism, both religious and Conservative and UKIP.

Fishing rules changed

Europe's common fisheries policy is set for radical reform after negotiators for EU governments and the European Parliament reached agreement last week.

It paves the way for rebuilding Europe's depleted fish stocks and curbing the discard of millions of tonnes of fish each year. An obligation to land all pelagic fish, such as mackerel, will commence from 1 January 2015. Other reforms, which must yet be formally approved by ministers and by MEPs, will be phased in over subsequent years. Long term management plans are to be prepared for every fishery with the aim of increasing fish numbers above the maximum sustainable yield. Fishermen will have a new role in determining practices appropriate to local conditions as micro-management from Brussels is reduced.

Road-safety testing proposals

The Transport committee has recommended to exempt motor-cycles across Europe but to include Caravans. The full parliament may vote on the proposals next month. See the link <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130527IPR10575/html/Transport-Committee-rules-motorbikes-out-of-roadworthiness-test-package>

Many other things are discussed – see this link to all the parliament's summaries of recent debates : <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/press-release/>

And **outside the formal debates** – such as

A vote by the public to find **Europe's finest tree** – the winner was a plane tree in Eger in Hungary, second was a Plane tree in Poland, and third was a King Oak in Southern Ireland. The UK was not invited to take part, so I have put the organisers in touch with the magnificent British website Ancient-Tree-Hunt.org.uk – which shows that we have more ancient trees in the UK than anywhere else in Europe, probably because Napoleon's armies did not cut down our forests for fuel.

The spreading of **wolves** was discussed by the Animal Welfare all-party group. After a huge campaign of eradication in the last century, wolves are returning – in national parks in Finland, Sweden, Poland and in the south in the Alps, the Balkans, Italy and north-western Spain. But wolves cross frontiers. The question is to find agreement on how to manage the spread and "how much wolf-human conflict do we want to tolerate ?"

All the best, Bill