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**Conservatives**  
in the **European Parliament**

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### Christmas

I trust that you enjoyed a splendid and relaxing Christmas break and are now refreshed and ready for the political action of 2014! The weather was appalling but, apparently, not as bad as in the south of England. I hope that no one experienced serious flooding and that you coped with the damp in a festive spirit.

### ... In Strasbourg

Christmas in Strasbourg is very appealing, not least because of the traditional market in and around the Cathedral and the elegant street decorations. But as you have no doubt been reading, we should not be here at all. It costs a fortune in taxpayers' money, involves regular and unnecessary trips, is detrimental to the environment and is thoroughly inconvenient all round. It should be stopped.



### A Judgement Issue

I must record my irritation at the antics of 95 Tory MPs in demanding the right to pick and choose the EU legislation that takes their fancy – or not. As the Foreign Secretary said on Radio 4, it is unrealistic, impractical and would destroy the Single Market which, arguably, is the EU's most effective achievement and of huge benefit to British industry. It is unhelpful politically, just when we are gearing up for the European Elections, and unfair to the Prime Minister, who has done his level best to defuse the argument within the Conservative Party with a policy of renegotiation and

referendum which is good for Britain. As a recent *Times* editorial put it, “*Conservatives cannot blame voters for finding their dispute dispiriting and off-putting... They don’t appear to appreciate how much this undermines their party and makes a rational conversation about the EU, which Britain urgently needs, considerably more difficult.*” A bit of old-fashioned loyalty to the leadership of our party and the candidates in the elections would not go amiss!

## **Ukraine**

I was present at a press conference given at the last plenary by a representative of the Ukrainian opposition. During the recent demonstrations protesting about Russia’s strongarm tactics against Ukraine becoming more involved with the EU, she was active in expressing her views, along with 100’s of thousands of her fellow citizens. Upon her return to Ukraine, she was beaten up and then arrested by the police. Says it all really, doesn’t it?



## **Barrow Shipyard**

Cllr. Kevin Beaty and I visited BAe in Barrow just before Christmas and spent a fascinating and informative few hours there. We were briefed on the great success of submarine construction, meeting various technicians and other employees, and saw the whole production from start to finish. We went on board the nearly-completed boat, “*Artful*”, (submarines are always called “boats”) and were very glad that we were unlikely ever to go to sea in such restricted working conditions. Crew members should not suffer from claustrophobia! Kevin and I came away very proud of Barrow’s important role in the defence of our country.



## **Students**

Coincidentally, Barrow’s 6<sup>th</sup> Form College visited Strasbourg in December and I was privileged to sponsor them again and to welcome them to Parliament. The teaching

staff deserve congratulations on the initiative, started many years ago, to bring students to the European Parliament on a regular basis. Barrow College is the only educational establishment that has done this throughout my Parliamentary term.

### **Altrincham G.S.**

I was, however, delighted to be asked to speak to the 6<sup>th</sup> Form at Altrincham Boys Grammar School in December. I confess that I was expecting an audience of about 20-30 and was astonished to see 100+ in the school hall. And what a well-informed and articulate audience they were. The questions and discussion were of a high order and I enjoyed myself immensely. I hope they did as well. I was told by the Headmaster that, each year, 1000 potential pupils apply to be considered for 100 places, proof indeed of an excellent and much sought-after school.



### **Honey**

We have been having a battle royal in Parliament over honey. Those involved in its production, together with most sensible people, understand that pollen is the key constituent of honey. Not so those obsessed with so-called GM foods, which includes Green MEPs and other like-minded “zealots”. They believe that pollen is an “ingredient” and, as such, should appear on the label so as to demonstrate whether or not it comes from GM crops. As though anyone can tell where the bee gets its pollen! But if these idiots get their way, it will become such a costly and lengthy process for each pot of honey that most small producers will be put out of business. Why is it that GM foods – which we all eat – can come from other parts of the world, such as Brazil and the USA – and yet some EU member states have closed their minds to this necessary change in food production? We have been doing it for centuries so what is so special about now?

### **Immigration**

The media has been having a field day over immigration recently, often producing conflicting stories on the same day. Only yesterday the “*Express*” claimed that we had been “flooded” by Romanians since January 1<sup>st</sup> and the “*Telegraph*” announced that only two dozen had arrived! Like so many current issues, you believe what confirms your prejudices. Perceptions in politics are more important than facts. But this controversial subject does require facts and cool, calm consideration. Immigration has been good for our country over the centuries – we are all mongrels, every one of us, - but fears abound about numbers and benefits. These must be addressed – and soon.

## Care for the Elderly

My elderly mother – aged 97 – is in a care home, and so I have been following the news stories and debates about care for the old very closely. Not least because I might find myself in the same position in the not-too-distant future! Those who look after Mother seem to be kind, attentive and sensitive to her frailties but do I know what is really going on when the family is not there? It is all about trust, combined with effective checks and regular oversight. We need to be resolving this conundrum now, since the numbers of future inmates are going up exponentially.

Paul Atkins

