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Conservatives
in the European Parliament

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Felicitations

A Happy and Prosperous New Year to you all - if that is not a contradiction in terms! I hope you all enjoyed the wet and soggy Christmas.

PM in NW

As many of you know, the Prime Minister was in the North West recently and made the point forcibly that our region is key to industrial regeneration and economic growth. It is also essential to the future electoral prospects of the Conservative Party. It seems probable now that the proposed boundary alterations have been blocked by the Opposition in the Lords, so we fight as before in the existing constituencies. This poses challenges and opportunities, not least in the early selection of candidates.



PM on Europe

The Prime Minister's postponed EU speech on Friday has certainly become the discussion point for media and politicians alike and you may not be surprised to learn that I am broadly supportive of David Cameron's declared objectives. It must be right that a referendum before any negotiations are completed, in the middle of a full-blown period of austerity, would be folly of the highest order. It should be a feature of the manifestos for the next election, followed by a rational and informed debate before people vote for Britain to remain a member of a reformed EU. As the US Government, the Norwegian Foreign Minister and numerous leading businessmen are

all saying, the alternatives are ill-considered, unappealing and potentially damaging to British interests.

UKIP

Perhaps it is opportune to make a point here about UKIP. I have witnessed their MEPs' behaviour in Parliament for a number of years and, to put it mildly, they are only truly active in the collection of their expenses. Indeed, some of them have been indicted and imprisoned for fraud. They are certainly noisy and rude in the Chamber but ill-informed, badly-researched and simply inadequate in the performance of their respective committee and Parliamentary duties. I think, too, that any member of one of our Conservative Associations who works for, supports or votes for any UKIP candidate - our electoral opponents - should either do the decent thing and resign or else be expelled. They cannot have it both ways.

Presidency

The turn of the year means a change in the Presidency of the European Union and Cyprus hands over to Ireland. Deservedly, the Irish Government has gained considerable credit for the decisive and effective manner in which it has dealt with the economic storm that hit the country a few years ago. It has not been easy but they are gradually getting it together. So there has been a warm welcome for their incoming Presidency and high hopes for a firmer resolution of some of the present EU troubles. Time will tell!



Enda Kenny

Gymnasts

I had the pleasure of visiting Garstang Gymnastic Club's Annual Display over Christmas and mighty impressive it was. Despite being located near me, members come from all over the North West and comprise young people from 5-17 years old.



Not only do their routines make me feel very old and out of condition, but the variety, skill and sheer fitness bode very well for their later lives. And some of them are already winning regional and national competitions. The future is very bright for British Gymnastics.

Barrow College

More young people came to Strasbourg just before Christmas, in the guise of Barrow 6th Form College. They have been making the annual Parliamentary visit since before I became an MEP, so the accompanying staff tend to know more about our activities than we do! But it is a welcome tradition, whereby the students learn about Parliament and its MEPs and have a splendid visit to an historic city.



Westmorland

I was the guest at Westmorland's Annual Christmas lunch a week or two ago in a delightful old house near Sizergh Castle. Excellent food, excellent company, excellent and penetrating questions and an enjoyable experience all round - including the speech, I hope!



Emergency!

My 96 year-old Mother, staying with us over Christmas, fell down on Boxing Day and cut her head rather badly. Panic stations all round and, for the first time in my life, I dialled 999 and summoned an ambulance. For the record, they were superb, calming her down and staunching the blood. And then they took her off to Preston Hospital where the wound was dressed and Mother was eventually sent home without too

much problem to enjoy the festivities. And the moral of the story is - the NHS cared for an elderly lady just as it should do and we are very grateful to all involved.

Paul Atkins
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