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Conservatives
in the **European Parliament**

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Regional Conference

The North West Conference was a highlight of the last few weeks, with a splendid turnout of Party members from throughout the region. The subjects aired were of a wide variety and I know that Saj Karim and Jaqui Foster enjoyed the MEP session as much as I did.



"Views of Palestine and Gaza"

Following my recent visits to Palestine and Gaza, I have produced a photographic record - in book form - of what I saw. I have sent it to a number of influential people in Government and the Diplomatic Service and it has been very well received. If you would like a copy, please email me and we will send you one.



Tory MEPs

Some changes have taken place in the British Conservative Delegation since I last wrote. Martin Callanan (NE) has become ECR Group Chairman thereby leaving a vacancy for the Delegation Leadership which, after a close ballot between three colleagues - Charles Tannock (Lon), Syed Kamall (Lon) and Richard Ashworth (SE) - went to the last of the three.



And, under the terms of the infamous Lisbon Treaty, we have gained another MEP for the UK. Luckily, the region chosen was the West Midlands - on population grounds - and the next in line was a Tory. So Anthea McIntyre has become the newest MEP and, of course, joined our Group. This serves to counteract the defection of another of our members who, as long as I have known him, has been a supporter of UKIP policy and that is where he has gone. It is just a pity that one or two others of a similar outlook haven't gone with him!

Sport

What with the imminent London Olympics, the media are taking a great interest in sport. I was not surprised, therefore, to be interviewed by the BBC World Service on my time as Sports Minister in the early 1990's (Is it really that long ago!). Questions about the contrast between Mrs. Thatcher - to whom sport was a closed book - and John Major were predictable but I was able to emphasise just how much radical improvement in facilities and direction of financial resources occurred under the latter's Premiership.



By-Election

I went to a by-election in Windermere Town Ward last month and, although the result was not great for us, it was very good to see real activity in Westmorland & Lonsdale. The only way to unsettle Tim Farron MP and his dominant Liberal organisation is to

get back to local campaigning. That was how the Liberals did it to us in South Lakeland and we must just do it back to them!



United Nations

For the first time ever, the President of the United Nations Assembly came to the European Parliament and addressed the Foreign Affairs Committee. Mr. Nassir Al-Nasser, a veteran diplomat from Qatar, talked mostly about the Middle East, with particular reference to Syria, Iran and Palestine. I questioned him as to the ability of the Security Council to achieve anything, given the blocking vetoes of Russia/China over Syria and the USA over Israel. He conceded the point and said that reform was needed urgently but, then, won't the blocking vetoes prevent any change?

Jewish Lobbying

I have had three particularly interesting meetings/visits over the last three weeks, starting with an evening in the company of the Manchester Jewish Representative Council. We discussed a number of subjects, covering "shechita" (the Jewish slaughter of livestock), anti-semitism and other specific Jewish issues. But, of course, members wanted to challenge me on my recent conclusions about Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Forceful - but friendly - exchanges ensued and, whilst no minds were changed, I am sure that my continuing concerns about Israel's treatment of the Palestinians provoked some reflection on their part. I do hope so, since these decent people can be very influential with Israeli politicians.

World Development Lobbying

I was asked also to attend a meeting of the Cumbrian World Development Movement to be lobbied about the damaging effects of food speculation. The WDM believe that the increasing number of food shortages, and the rising prices caused thereby, are as a direct result of financial speculators now turning their attention to this particularly lucrative market. I have undertaken to explore on their behalf.

Agricultural Lobbying

Finally, I spent the best part of a day with some regional livestock and arable farmers to discuss the effects of the Commission's proposed reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. I was able to see a modern computer-controlled milking operation and the farmers lobbied me on livestock rearing and slaughtering policy. I then went

on to a food production farm, growing and supplying vast quantities of potatoes, and we talked about the "green" requirements of the CAP and the financial implications for all farmers. Fascinating and informative visits.



Iceland

There was a brief debate on Iceland last week and, as our Group spokesman on that country's application, I made a short contribution. The nub of my speech was a broad welcome to Iceland but I entered some strong reservations about the constant depredations of Northern European mackerel stocks, contrary to WTO guidelines, and Iceland's intransigence about ceasing these nefarious activities. Negotiations will continue!

Robert Atkins

