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Conservatives
in the **European Parliament**

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Problems

Apologies for the lack of a newsletter last month but I had a minor back operation and was not allowed to drive or fly for a month. In the event, there has not been a lot to report in Parliament - with the minor exception of the problems in the Eurozone!

Lack of Vision

Much navel-gazing and wry remarks from EuroZone MEPs, a recognition of John Major's sensible decision for Britain not to join the Single Currency but a blind determination to keep the "European Project" going at all costs. It is a continuing puzzle to me as to why so many of my continental Parliamentary colleagues and the Leaderships of their various Governments simply will not accept that the "project" is misguided, that majorities in almost every country are opposed to many of the policies being pursued by those Parliamentary and Government leaders and that review, retrenchment and reform should be the order of the day!

Saj Karim MEP

I was very disturbed to hear from my Colleague, Saj Karim, that his home was threatened recently by 30+ thugs from the English Defence League. These people picketed his house until police arrived to clear them away and they have announced that they will be back to do it again. They are picking on Saj and his family in their racist opposition to those of Asian background and Islamic religion. Understandably, Saj is concerned for the safety of his family and I have told him that he has my complete support in rejecting and rebutting the EDL's unacceptable policies and behaviour.

Security

I paid a fascinating and informative visit last week to the Home Office's National Border Targeting Centre, adjacent to Manchester Airport. I was briefed by the responsible Minister, Lady Browning, and given a thorough insight into the system that evaluates potential terrorists and/or serious criminals passing through our airports

- or not, as the case might be! Most of what I was told was confidential - rightly so - but I was greatly heartened to witness the professionalism of the staff and sophistication of the equipment. I feel a great deal safer now and so should you.

BLESMA

Dulcie is Town Mayor of Garstang again - ten years after her last performance (!) - and her charity this time is BLESMA (British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association). The organisation's only residential home is in Blackpool, caring for injured men and women from throughout the UK. We made a Mayoral Visit last weekend and were moved and impressed by the care and kindness shown to all the residents. They have a bar called the "Legless Arms" and morale is astonishingly high. But, since the inception of "Help for Heroes" - another remarkable organisation but one that caters only for the injured after 2000 - fundraising has been increasingly difficult. They are elderly men and women, injured well before 2000 and BLESMA deserves your support for the great service that it performs. Don't forget them.

Ministerial Visit

Alistair Burt MP, Foreign Office Minister responsible for all the difficult parts of the world, was in Brussels recently and I arranged for him to meet some colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Committee. He briefed Tory MEPs on various issues, especially North Africa and the Middle East, as well as some Party gossip from Westminster and made a substantial impact on the Commission and UKREP.



With the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee

Windsor

Our Group, the ECR, arranged some Study Days for Members last week and we invited our colleagues to Windsor. Ideally suited for Heathrow and close enough to London for Ministers, a wide-ranging programme of subjects and speakers was provided. The EU, with Europe Minister, David Lidington; Common Fisheries Policy with Minister, Richard Benyon; Transport with Minister, Theresa Villiers, and so on. There was also a reception at Carlton Gardens, hosted by William Hague and, the highlight, a special visit from the Prime Minister. We also enjoyed a private tour of Windsor Castle which impressed our foreign colleagues no end!



Prime Minister



Foreign Secretary

Underneath the Norman Arches!

S.M.M.T.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders came to Brussels recently to lobby MEPs on the state of the British (and European) motor industry. Having represented Leyland as an MP, I have a particular interest here and now, of course, the North West has even wider connections with Bentley, Vauxhall, Jaguar and their feeder suppliers. The SMMT is worried about a number of issues - tax, environmental pressures, employment laws etc. - and we promised to do what we can to assist.

Constituency Changes

Following David Cameron's pledge before the Election and the legislation afterwards, the vexed question of Parliamentary Boundaries is upon us again. The House of Commons is to be reduced from 650 MPs to 600 and that means larger - and fewer - constituencies. It equates to seven less seats in the North West and potential controversy about local identities, community ties, numbers of electors and, not least, candidate/MP selection. What is it that the Chinese say? May you live in interesting times!

Recess

The Summer Recess is now upon us and I hope that you enjoy your holidays and return suitably refreshed. I shall write again in September.

Robert Atkins