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Conservatives
in the European Parliament

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Parliamentary Boundaries

I have spent a considerable time over the last few weeks absorbed in the proposed new Parliamentary Constituencies. First at the two regional meetings, then discussions with some Associations or MPs and finally at two of the Public Hearings. All of this is as nothing compared to the sterling work done by Deputy Chairman, John Walsh, and his amanuensis, Simon Eardley. Armed with maps, statistics, calculators and notepads, they have consulted the relevant parties and represented Conservative interests extraordinarily well.

That is not to say, of course, that every Association agrees with the overall counter-proposal that the Party has presented. I know there is considerable irritation in some constituencies. But, given the reduction by seven of NW MPs, I think Messrs. Pratt, Walsh and Eardley have made the best of it for the Conservative cause. We now await the results of the independent Commissioner's deliberations which we will learn some time next year. Keep your fingers crossed!

Eurozone Difficulties

At the last Plenary Session in Brussels, Commission President Barroso came under real pressure from both sides of the "Eurozone" argument.



Barroso under pressure

Assailed by those MEPs using the Euro for not being yet more "European" or federalist, and attacked by the non-Eurozone MEPs like British Conservatives or MEPs from Sweden, Denmark, Poland etc., he struggled to make much of a coherent

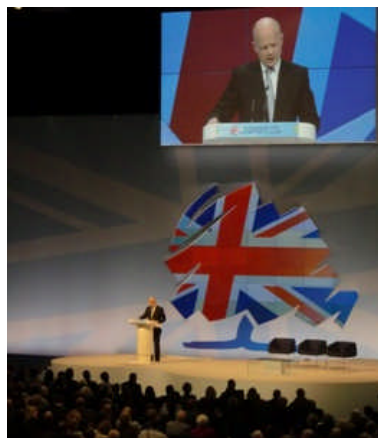
speech. Clearly the divisions - not to say serious fears - amongst many for whom the "European Project" is the Holy Grail, are really deep. And whilst the UK is being well-served by not being in the Euro, we should be under no illusions as to the highly detrimental effects on our economy of a possible collapse of the Eurozone.

House of Commons Debate

I was saddened that the wholly unnecessary debate in the House of Commons has re-opened the divisions in our party over Europe. I lost my seat in 1997 largely because of the chasm this issue caused over the last years of a Conservative Government and, if we are not very careful, it will happen all over again. For example, in my 48 years of membership of the Conservative Party, I cannot recall an occasion when a Chairman of the 1922 Committee voted against his own Government, an extraordinary state of affairs. But this is not the place to rehearse all the arguments which will merely serve to deepen those divisions. However, I am firmly of the opinion that, whenever a referendum might be held, those in favour of our membership of the EU - necessarily re-vamped and re-negotiated though it may be - will win the day. You read it here first! (Link to my [Statement](#) on the EU.)

Party Conference

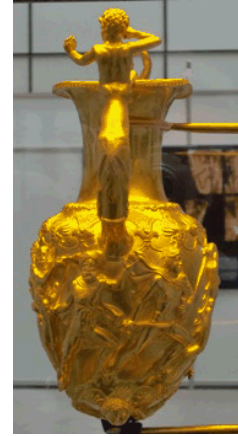
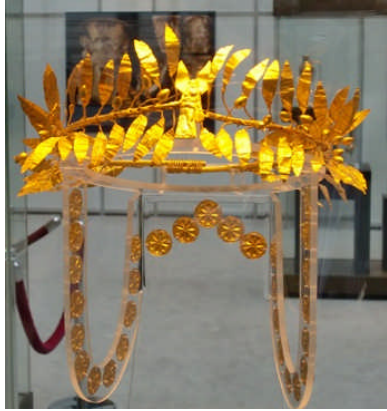
I thought that the Conference was a great success. A touch sombre, I accept, but none the worse for that in the present economic climate. Clearly, there is a great deal of interest in the Party from lobbyists of all backgrounds but, properly monitored, that is a right and proper indication that we are listening to the people in all their different guises. And the Prime Minister's speech was exemplary.



It is an expensive excursion, however, and I do hope that the Party hierarchy gives some urgent and productive thought as to how the costs to ordinary Association representatives might be reduced in future years.

Thracian Antiquities

There was a quite splendid exhibition in Parliament's main Brussels building recently. On show were treasures from Thrace (now modern-day Bulgaria) of simply exquisite workmanship. Most in solid gold and dating back some 2500 years, they literally took one's breath away.



Out and About

I had the pleasure of speaking twice in Cumbria last month, at Beckermeth to the Copeland Ladies, and near Longtown, to the Penrith Ladies. They both picked wonderful locations, provided splendid lunches and questioned me relentlessly about matters European. Quite right too, with so much uncertainty and worry about the state of European Economies. I am certain that I do not have the answers but I shall carry back the Ladies' concerns to the European Parliament.



Copeland Ladies

Ukraine

The Foreign Affairs Committee - along with many other MEPs - has expressed its strong displeasure with the Government of Ukraine - a longterm applicant for membership of the EU. This is over the disgraceful "show" trial of former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, also a potential candidate for the Presidency. She is no angel but the manner of her arrest, trial, fine and lengthy imprisonment is a harsh throwback to Stalinist days and wholly unacceptable in a more democratic world. The sentence must be revoked.

City of Sport 2012

You may recall that Preston has won the title of European City of Sport for 2012 and I went to the presentation of the shield at Preston North End last month. Preceded by some energetic gymnastics and other sporting activity, it was the start of what will be an exciting year for Preston. 2012 is Guild Year (which only comes round every 20 years) as well, of course, as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Palestine (3)

I am off to Egypt and Gaza again next week so will report on what I find in next month's newsletter. Much has changed since last year, not least in Egypt, but I suspect that, actually, much still remains the same. I hope I am proved wrong.

Lancashire

Finally, I could not resist this photograph!



Paul Atkins
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