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Crackdown on dubious trading practices

The EU has recently shown its desire to tackle the worst excesses of international bank trading. First MEPs voted to ban sovereign debt speculation which sees traders take out insurance against a failure by governments to pay their debts even if the speculators themselves do not actually own those government bonds. The added pressure these speculations were causing have been pushing countries further into financial trouble. Then, after research revealed that commodities traders had exacerbated the famine in eastern Africa by driving up the prices of food to artificially high levels, the European Commission announced plans to update the EU's Market Abuse directive. Labour MEPs are fighting to ensure that traders are prevented from manipulative, unethical practices that cause dramatic spikes in the costs of fuel and food for the world's poorest people.

Cameron leaves UK isolated

In politics like in life, you need friends and allies. David Cameron's decision to exercise his "veto" may have won him plaudits in the right-wing press this week and put smiles on the faces of his Eurosceptic backbenchers, but it diminished Britain's standing not just in Europe but in the rest of the world. Indications suggest that the US is far from impressed: Britain's "special relationship" depends these days on our ability to act as a bridge between the EU and the US. No bridge, no influence.

Cameron has been keen to portray his decision as one he had to make in order to 'defend' the interests of Britain. Yet this is simply not the case. The Tories have suggested that if they had struck an agreement then Britain's tax and spending decisions would be made in Brussels. Not true. The binding rules on budget discipline would apply to Eurozone countries only. And the idea that he acted to stop a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) on the City (so called Robin Hood tax)? Leaving aside for now the arguments about the merits of such a tax, this assertion is nonsense. Britain has a veto on the FTT as it does on all tax measures at EU level. Nothing changed that at the EU summit.

In reality David Cameron snubbed our EU partners for an easy victory in the tabloids and to quell growing discontent in his own party. On the eve of the summit, Tory backbenchers paraded in the media calling for a referendum in the event of any EU Treaty changes, even ones which affect only the Eurozone. Cameron felt his position under threat, particularly after Boris Johnson, who many say is gearing himself as next Tory leader, flatly contradicted the Prime Minister. So we had a manufactured row in Brussels to appease the Tory back benches. But Cameron reaps what he sows. Elected Tory leader on a promise to the Tory right to take his MEPs away from the European centre-right mainstream, he continues in office throwing titbits to the Eurosceptic beast. But the titbits will never be enough. The beast wants red meat, it wants out of the EU and nothing else will do. And even he knows that would be disastrous for Britain. As Ed Milliband told the Commons, "Faced with a choice between the national interest and his party interest, he (Cameron) has chosen the party interest. We will rue the day this Prime Minister left Britain alone, without allies, without influence. It is bad for Britain, bad for jobs, and bad for Britain." Exactly.

Transparency victory for Labour MEPs

EU citizens could be granted access to all documents in EU institutions following a vote in the European Parliament. The proposal, guided through the parliament by Labour MEP Michael Cashman, is designed to make the EU more open, accessible and accountable. However, it must also win approval from EU governments and the Tory and Lib Dem coalition have already stated their opposition to the plans.



Durban climate deal

In contrast to the EU summit, the Durban climate change talks finished with agreement. After marathon talks, developing and developed countries, including, for the first time the United States, China and India, all agreed to start negotiations on a new global agreement to reduce carbon emissions that will come into effect by 2020. It was EU countries working collectively and speaking with one voice that stopped the summit ending in failure, getting even the most reluctant signed up. The details of the deal and the levels of cuts in emissions needed in each country must be decided by 2015. While it is good news that all countries have agreed to act in a single framework, there are nevertheless serious concerns that without strict binding targets in place already, we will miss the opportunity to contain global warming. The show is still on the road, but we still have a long way to go to get emissions down within scientifically acceptable limits.



Caged hen battle

The new year will see the ban on caged hens come into force across the EU. While British farmers have invested money into improving the welfare of their hens some farmers in some other EU countries will not meet the deadline. Farmers and the British Egg Industry Council are now concerned that their higher welfare eggs will be undercut by imports of caged hen eggs. A campaign asking the government to ban the sale of eggs produced by caged hens in non-compliant EU countries has failed. Labour MEPs are urging EU governments to take action against farmers flouting the rules.



EU sets focus on health

As the average age of much of Europe's population continues to rise more and more people are being affected by severe illnesses like cancer and neurological diseases. Across Europe 1.2million people suffer from Parkinson's disease and there are around 10,000 people in our region living with the disease. The numbers are set to double by 2013. At the end of November Linda hosted an event in the European Parliament, which launched a new Europe-wide study that sets out the treatment patients with Parkinson's need and the action governments must take to cope with the growing problem. Labour MEPs will continue to work with the European Parkinson's Disease Association in order to drive up the quality of treatment for people with Parkinson's across Europe. Back in the constituency Linda met with scientists funded by Cancer Research UK, to learn about the world class research they are doing in Leeds. Over 26,000 people a year are diagnosed with cancer in Yorkshire & the Humber alone and the work the scientists are doing is helping to bring patients in our region better access to the latest treatments available.



Hearing about the work of Cancer Research UK

Action on antibiotics

November's Antibiotics Action conference saw Linda call for Europe-wide action to tackle the current antibiotic crisis. Annually around 25,000 EU citizens die from diseases like MRSA, which have become resistant to ordinary antibiotics. Linda's speech at a major conference coincided with the publication of an EU action plan to thwart the spread of antimicrobial resistance. The plan urges doctors to reduce their prescribing of antibiotics, raises awareness of how to properly use antibiotics and encourages drug companies to develop much needed antibiotics that can beat antimicrobial disease. Hospitals across Yorkshire and the Humber face a daily battle against diseases like MRSA and it is a problem that will not be solved by one hospital alone. Only collective action across the EU will tackle this deadly problem.



Call for EU-wide action