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The Arab Spring: "EU still in denial."

EDWARD MCMILLAN-SCOTT laments the failure of the EU Commission and much vaunted EU External Action Service to grasp the nature of the uprising for democracy sweeping the Arab world.

The referendum in Egypt on parts of the constitution on 19 March, was the first in a process which will transform North Africa and the Arab world.

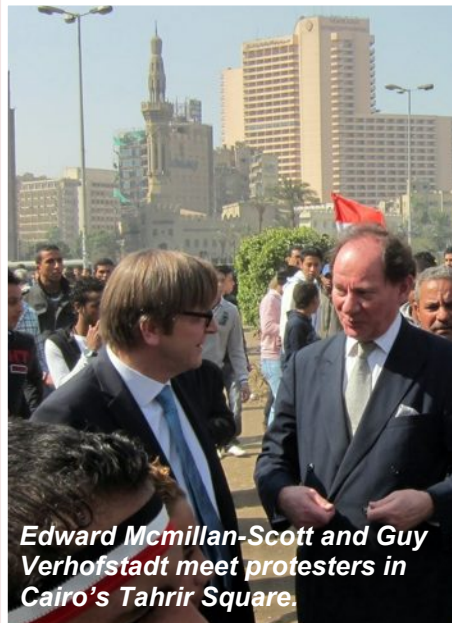
Democracy is now fully on the agenda in Egypt and Tunisia and is the likely instigator of the revolutions in Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen and almost certainly elsewhere.

As a relation of Lawrence of Arabia I have followed events in the Arab world since childhood. As an MEP I have been active in trying to promote democracy and human rights there, and was chief parliamentary observer for the crucial elections in Palestine.

Now, as European Parliament vice-president for democracy and human rights, I have been honoured to travel twice to Cairo since Mubarak fell to meet the Coalition for Change and other activists. On the second visit with Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the liberal group in the European Parliament, I met our political counterparts in Egypt again, the secular **El Ghad** ('the future') party.

The universal view outside government circles in Egypt is that many months are needed to put Egypt on track for full democracy. The rush to the polls by Egypt's caretaker government is a transparent attempt to hang onto as much of the former regime's power and privileges as possible.

I observed the 2005 parliamentary elections in Egypt and even then no one trusted, quite rightly, Egyptian



Edward McMillan-Scott and Guy Verhofstadt meet protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

polls. Sadly, last month's referendum - which despite intense lobbying by the National Assembly for Change encouraging voters to say 'no', was passed - was not held to international standards. The Arab world is watching Egypt - a hugely important country in the region and in order to ensure a stable democratic future, the process to constitutional change should be managed properly.

A parody of democracy

On the eve of a debate in the European Parliament on 6 April, I helped to organise a hearing with experts speaking about the region and what is happening in other Arab nations. In Bahrain it appears that

already at least 23 have been killed by the regime; in Syria at least 132 and in Yemen at least 63. I said in the debate: "The European Parliament has closely followed events with many of us visiting the region.

"Our resolutions on Egypt, Libya and Tunisia were full of serious proposals. The response from Commission and Council reflected hardly any of them. This is a parody of democracy, not a partnership for democracy"

It is imperative that we clarify the EU's position on Bahrain and the wider region, following the conclusions of the last Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting in which they called on "demonstrators to refrain from deliberately intimidating actions" and similar inappropriate remarks by Robert Cooper, Baroness Ashton's adviser on the Middle East, in a meeting of the Europe Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in which he

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- Davies urges backing for Fatah - Hamas deal

Liberal News from Ideg.org

We owe the Arab world a new political and economic partnership



by Jonathan Fryer

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claimed that the authorities were right to 'restore order' in Bahrain. We continue to be in the same denial that we were in, in the beginning. The EU is sending completely the wrong signal to people involved in a historic protest against the tyrants of the wider Middle East. Europe's links with these regimes were unprincipled in the past. Now is the time to address the concerns of the democratic rulers of the future.

This business as usual approach has to stop.

At the European Parliament we are appalled by lack of leadership from the EU. This is our neighbourhood, not the Americans' and yet they are there politically, they are there militarily, they are there financially. Europe is not just for humanitarian aid. We stand for values and we should be standing up for those values and not simply saying we will send aid, only once it's safe to do so.

The EU is supposed to stand up for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The people of Cairo are looking forward to democracy and rule of law - the kind that they've never tasted before. For the EU not to support the process of reform is a grave mistake.

Edward Mcmillan Scott is MEP for Yorkshire and The Humber

The great wave of pro-democracy uprisings that has swept across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) since the self-immolation of a young itinerant vegetable seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, caught just about everyone in the European Union by surprise.

Inevitably, parallels have been drawn between this so-called Arab Awakening and the collapse of Communism following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. But the situation in MENA is not as clear-cut. There is no single ideology being challenged; instead there is a diverse range of autocracies under pressure.

Certainly, there was a domino effect after Tunisia's President Ben Ali unexpectedly fled into exile in Saudi Arabia, a development that gave hope to pro-democracy campaigners in Egypt. And the moving footage live from Cairo's Tahrir Square during Hosni Mubarak's ousting did help people subject to autocracy for generations across the region to lose some of their fear, to stand up and be counted.

Yet each country, each situation, across MENA is unique. Accordingly, the EU and its member states must avoid a one-size-fits-all response.

Europe does have a key role to play, however. MENA is the EU's backyard, just as much as Central America and the Caribbean are that of the US. President Obama was wise to resist taking the lead on action against Libya's Colonel Gaddafi. Instead, it fell to Britain and France – a new *entente cordiale!* – to step into the breach, while NATO got its act together.

This is especially significant as the Libyan intervention was really the first occasion on which the newly promoted International Law principle of 'Responsibility to Protect' on behalf of a threatened civilian population was put to the test. It was fitting that EU member states (despite Germany's reluctance) should be at the forefront in this, as the Responsibility to Protect is based on core European values. For too long, MENA has been viewed by

politicians in Europe essentially as a source of energy (whose security is of paramount concern) but also as a threatening reservoir of unemployed youth whose sole dream is to get to Europe, by hook or by crook, in search of work and a better life. Italy has indeed had to bear the brunt of a new tide of illegal immigration, especially from Tunisia after Ben Ali's departure and more recently from Libya. Rome is right to expect some European solidarity in coping with that influx.

France was right

However, I would argue that there is a more important solidarity that needs to be acknowledged and consolidated between the EU and MENA, not as a short-term contingency, but as a long-term form of new partnership. That solidarity must be both political and economic. France pushed this idea hard in recent years, long before the current Arab Awakening, receiving a very cool response from northern European EU partners. Recent events now mean this new partnership has become an urgent priority.

In the meantime, Liberal Democrats – and our sister parties on the Continent – have an opportunity to step up their cooperation with political groups and movements in key countries such as Egypt and Jordan, to share experiences and help build open democratic systems, through ELDR, Liberal International and bodies such as the UK government-funded Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

For all its diversity, what has been happening across MENA means there is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for the EU not only to evolve a more coherent Common Foreign and Security Policy but also to nurture democracy and human rights in a near neighbourhood that has for too long been denied both.

Jonathan Fryer, twice No 2 on London Lib Dems' Euro-list at the Euro-elections, is a freelance writer and broadcaster on North Africa and the Middle East, as well as lecturing at SOAS. He is a member of the LDEG Executive.

Lesson One from North Africa: Stop arming dictators

Reflecting on the popular democratic uprisings in the Arab world, the tragedy of Misurata and elsewhere, there are three lessons which can be learned that should inform our policy from now on.

The first is that it is no good preaching the values of democracy if we arm its enemies. Having armed Gaddafi and other autocrats there is a logical case to be made for arming the protesters, particularly if we fail to live up to the 'duty to protect' laid down in the UN Charter: but this policy should be pursued only in extremis.

Most important, however, is to stop arms sales to autocratic regimes wherever they are: democracy's appeal is not limited to North Africa, nor the temptation to beleaguered autocrats to use arms against their own people.

Second, let us act now to devise a common EU foreign policy which denies the leaders of autocratic governments and their immediate

families access to our countries for private purposes: they should not be allowed to launder their wealth through our banking systems or property markets, educate their children in our schools or take private holidays in our resorts.

As a Member of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, I have made an official Recommendation to the European Council based on this idea. Neither of the above policies would cost us more than we can easily afford.

Recognise democratic forces

Third, we should recognise transitional interim governments (or whatever victorious protesters call themselves) as legitimate (though not necessary the sole legitimate) representatives of their peoples as long as they remain committed to democracy; and we should cease to recognise their oppressors.

Poland's 'Solidarity' movement was recognised long before it had any legitimate democratic foundation. We should make contact with the

leaders of the north African popular uprisings and ensure that our diplomats keep in touch with prominent dissidents in undemocratic countries wherever they serve.

These three simple steps would enhance respect for democracy, send a strong signal to those who do not respect its rules - and put us on the right side of history.

Graham Watson, MEP for the South West region and Gibraltar, is a Member of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and Chairman of its delegation for relations with India. He is a Vice President of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party.



By Graham Watson

Building a Liberal Europe: The ALDE Project

by Graham Watson MEP.

Eurofile recommends this fascinating account and clear insight for the future of European Liberalism, informed by more than a decade shaping the third force in EU politics.

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TURKEY: A key role to play, says ALDE

The European Parliament has voted on Turkey's 2010 progress report. Turkey provides inspiration to many in the Arab world as a secular democracy with a majority Muslim population. Nevertheless, Turkish accession faces multiple challenges, not least Cyprus and a lack of progress on human rights. Given the Arab popular uprisings, ALDE feels that Turkey has a key role to play and secured a key reference in the final draft of Parliament's resolution.



Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (FDP, Germany) ALDE Shadow Rapporteur on Turkey said: "More than ever,

Turkey has a cardinal role to play. To fulfil this role, it ... must coordinate its foreign and security policy closely with the EU. For liberals and democrats, the situation of fundamental rights like freedom of information, expression and assembly is still a matter of concern. Turkey's achievements in that regard have been unsatisfactory and leave a lot to be desired."

Andrew Duff MEP, ALDE Member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Turkey, said "Europe is in danger of losing Turkey and Turkey of losing Europe. The whole relationship needs radical reassessment on more truthful foundations. Both parties are to blame for the strategic crisis."

Change that works for Europe & for you

FUKUSHIMA: The political aftershocks are just beginning



Jane Manning looks at the political impact of Japan's crisis and what it means for nuclear power in Europe.

When the earthquake and subsequent Tsunami hit Japan and caused severe damage to three nuclear reactors in Fukushima, the global nuclear industry experienced political aftershocks that bring into question the very future of nuclear power in the EU.

Nuclear power had been gaining support because of its ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to energy security. Nuclear energy is used to produce one third of the electricity generated in the EU, but post disaster, the debate has seen the EU countries divided. France, where 80% of electricity is nuclear, was angered by Germany's move to shut down seven reactors and declare plans to phase out nuclear power altogether. France fears that Germany's decision may prove to be a political boost for anti-nuclear groups. Austria is also demanding that nuclear power be phased out, while Bulgaria has tightened restrictions on its Belene reactor near an earthquake zone.

An emergency meeting of EU energy ministers on 21 March agreed on stress tests to gauge the resilience of plants to possible catastrophe, such as earthquakes, floods, plane crashes and terrorism. This received the backing of European leaders who met on 25 March and reached a parallel agreement to set the "highest standards" of nuclear safety. The European leaders also called for the implementation of existing plans to bury nuclear waste underground, hoping to avoid the unsafe storage of radioactive spent fuel rods which contributed to Japan's disaster.

As we pass the 25th anniversary of Chernobyl on 26 April, memories of this disaster are bound to filter into the nuclear policy debate. In the UK the coalition government last year identified eight potential sites in England and Wales for new nuclear power stations to be built by 2025. Nuclear energy accounts for 20% of the UK electricity supply.

The dilemma facing governments is how to implement a low carbon sustainable framework to achieve greenhouse gas emission targets while not pursuing a reckless rush to nuclear. In Britain particularly, there is also a debate surrounding the cost benefit credentials of nuclear power. Though the setting up and eventual decommissioning of a nuclear plant is

expensive, ongoing costs are fairly low due to the reasonable cost of uranium. Fukushima could increase the nuclear costs due to higher insurance premiums on reactors.

However, even if all the political arguments are resolved, there is still public opinion to contend with. The word 'nuclear' now strikes fear. Images of rising smoke from the Japanese reactors; men in white suits like something from a Hollywood disaster movie and constant breaking news on the high radiation readings are stoking anti-nuclear sentiment.

Would you want a nuclear station to be built in your town? The localism agenda will wage a fierce war against government narrative.

If nuclear power were to be removed, what would it do for global emissions? According to experts there would be a noticeable change in global warming for the worse. In 2010 the UN Environment Programme estimated that to have a reasonable chance of limiting global warming to less than 2C, annual CO2 emissions should fall by around 25% to 44bn tonnes by 2020. With stringent action countries could cut emissions to 49bn tonnes but that leaves a gap of 5bn tonnes at least. Nuclear energy currently contributes to a saving of 2bn tonnes. It may be difficult for renewables to bridge this gap.

EP in stalemate over nuclear safety

ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt has condemned the failure of the European Parliament to reach any decision on nuclear safety:

He said: "I deplore the fact that no majority has been found. Two extreme positions, those who want nothing to happen and those who want nuclear plants to close down immediately, have hindered the Parliament to have a position at all. This is really sad.

"How can we ever move forward in this very important issue of nuclear safety if some

political groups fail to look for a good compromise? Sticking to an extreme position is the same as moving backwards."

British Lib Dem delegation leader Fiona Hall added: "Reviewing nuclear safety standards within the EU is a long overdue exercise.

"Member States do need to be honest and open about the actual costs of nuclear energy, including insurance aspects, the unresolved problem of radioactive waste, state intervention in case of accidents or emergencies and other state aid."

Pensions policy in the EU must be devolved but fair - Liz Lynne

West Midlands Lib Dem MEP Liz Lynne has welcomed the stress on devolution and fairness in a key European Parliament report on Pensions provision across the EU.

The Parliament at Strasbourg voted to back a report by Dutch MEP Ria Oomen-Ruijten responding to the EU Commission's review of EU pension policy.

In a speech during the debate as First Vice President of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, Liz Lynne welcomed the report's conclusions and the adoption of amendments from her committee.

She said: "This report makes it clear that pensions are first and foremost the responsibility of Member States.

"Thankfully, we have rejected any call for a minimum pension at EU level as well as for Solvency 2 type

regulation to be applied to pensions.

"The Lisbon Treaty makes it clear that it is Member States, not the EU, who are responsible for pension provision. But what we can do is share best practice and experience.

"I am pleased that my amendment calling for the implementation of the Employment Directive 2000, to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of age is also included.

"With regard to retirement age, I have always made clear what we must do is keep a pensionable age, set at Member State level, in other words an age at which you are entitled to start claiming your pension, but that we should scrap compulsory retirement ages which



force people to stop working even if they want to carry on."

Liz has urged other EU governments to follow the example of the UK coalition in banning compulsory retirement ages.

The European Commission is expected to bring forward a white paper on pensions later this year.

Sharon Bowles blasts Merkel as 'holier than thou' as Ireland is held to ransom



South East Euro MP Sharon Bowles has bitterly criticised the decision to not reduce interest rates for Irish debt repayments.

Eurozone leaders met in Brussels and agreed to strengthen the bloc's €440bn rescue fund and lower the interest rates on Greece's bailout loans by 1%, but refused to do the same for Ireland.

Sharon Bowles said: "The treatment Ireland is getting at the hands of Germany in particular is very un-European. This holier than thou attitude of Merkel is unreasonable.

"Ireland does not deserve to be held to ransom. Ireland has been taking her fair share of medicinal austerity as evidenced by the 1% deflation last year, whereas Greece had inflation of 4.5%.

"Mrs Merkel is making the Irish pay twice for their sins - once to look after German banks because they are massively undercapitalised and exposed to Irish banks, which is why the Irish rescue package required a pledge to maintain the solvency of their banks, and then to make a tidy profit on the high interest."

Change that works for Europe & for you

Per head, the EU costs just 1/8 of an average county council

Euro sceptics like to pretend the EU is a huge superstate with a superpower budget. The reality is very different, as LDEG vice chair ANTONY HOOK explains:

It has been said that state bodies, whether local councils, national governments or the EU do two things: "make the rules and spend the money." It is helpful for every campaigner to have a basic understanding of the real facts on the European budget.

The first point to note is the EU budget is relatively small. The 2011 budget is 126 billion euros, which divided between 500 million citizens is just 252 euros per person or about 5 euros per week. The budget is less than one per cent of GDP.

Our own local councils spend many times more than this per head. Kent County Council for example, run by supposedly fiscally restraining Conservatives, will spend £2.4 billion this year for a population of 1.4 million people. That's about £1700 per head annually or 34 pounds per week.

Figures for your local council can be found on its website but a reasonable doorstep statement is,

"Europe only costs each of us one-eighth of what our County Council does."

Obviously the local council comparison is even sharper if you include District councils or are in a unitary authority.

The UK national government spends about 40 times as much per capita as the European Union. One anti-Europe guest on the BBC's *Question Time* show recently claimed that withdrawal from the EU would solve all the UK's financial problems. Any appreciation of the figures shows this is nonsense.

It is claimed that the UK pays an unfair share. But the reality is all member states pay a roughly equal share of the GDP and in fact the UK contributes much less than other large states:

Paying into the 2011 budget:

UK	13bn euros (£11.5bn)
Germany	21bn euros
France	19bn euros
Italy	14bn euros

About half of the UK contribution comes back in direct grants but even leaving that aside the gross UK contribution is just £192 per person each year or 50p per day each.

"Europe only costs British people 50p per day each and we get half of that back in grants that support jobs and the economy."

EU spending is not perfect and Liberal Democrats are always looking for ways to ensure money is used well, just as we do at national and local levels. But a large portion of the budget is used for

work that any reasonable person would see as important.

In 2011, 56bn euros will be spent on aid to farmers and supporting rural communities. Without this **the price of food in shops would greatly increase**, while many farmers would go out of business causing job losses in rural areas and displacement of food production to virgin land elsewhere with implications for climate change.

53bn euros go on "cohesion and competitiveness". This includes grants to support technological research to help our economy, develop sustainable energy and assist poorer areas of Europe to catch up, including some parts of Britain.

It is in everyone's interest for poorer areas to improve, not least because they can then be a market for goods of services supplied from better-developed areas. The other 17bn euros go on global aid, co-operation against crime and terrorism, supporting arts and culture and higher education.

We can rightly say on the doorstep, **"EU spending is overwhelmingly on important problems that can be solved best when we co-operate together in Europe."**

Antony Hook

antony@antonyhook.com

ELDR Focus for 2011: refining the budget, reforming Europe

The ELDR Party has launched a special website dedicated to our main thematic focus of the year: the negotiations over the EU Budget and the *Multinational Financial Framework*, which will run from 2014 to 2020 and will determine the EU's economic fortunes over the coming decade.



By logging on to www.eldrfocus.eu, you will not only be able to read liberal views and discussion on these issues – you also have the possibility to vote in frequent polls, contribute to the discussion and ask questions to key liberal politicians from all over Europe.

This *Focus Year* will run until November 2011, when the discussion will be the cornerstone and main theme of THE European Liberal event in 2011: the **ELDR Party Congress in Palermo, Italy!** Get involved, shape our Liberal future.

All year round LibDem ACTION in Europe

EU must tackle its toxic waste scandal

Illegal shipments of toxic waste are on the rise. Each year the EU produces some 70 million tonnes of toxic waste.

More and more of this waste is being illegally exported to developing countries – where methods of disposal fall far short of stringent EU rules and have terrible consequences for the environment and people's health.

Reported annual illegal shipments from the EU vary between 6,000 and 47,000 tons, however, due to member states failing to implement the Waste Shipments Directive effectively, Greenpeace say this is just the tip of the iceberg.

At the moment Member States are left to enforce the Waste Shipments Regulation (WSR), but this has led to inconsistencies across Europe on its implementation – the Commission has described it as 'inconsistent and presumably not realistic'. Almost 70% of electronic

waste in the EU is unaccounted for and only 33% of waste electrical and electronic equipment is treated according to EU legislation. Until the Commission produces a set of common guidelines on how to carry out inspections on waste shipments this situation can only get worse.

Guidelines would strengthen the bodies enforcing the WSR. They would also enable the collection, analysis and exchange of comparable data that could help address the issue of trans-national environmental crime linked to illegal waste shipments.

What happens AFTER collection?

The new WEEE directives are driving better behaviour by the EU citizens and we are all getting better at taking our waste to the official waste collection sites, but what happens to it after that is often very poorly regulated and at risk of criminal activities that end up putting the people in developing countries at risk ”



Two recent studies for the Commission have concluded that legislation is needed to address the problem of illegal shipments of toxic waste. In February 2010 a study recommended setting up a dedicated agency at EU level to tackle the underlying problems of poor implementation and enforcement of EU waste legislation.

Now is the time to push the Commission on this issue. The ALDE group wants positive action to tackle this problem now before more harm is done and will not relent until it is taken.

Catherine Bearder MEP

Westerwelle quits as FDP leader, Rösler likely to succeed

After a series of disappointing regional election results, Guido Westerwelle has announced he will quit as FDP leader, though he remains Germany's foreign minister.



Health Minister **Philipp Rösler** MD looks most likely to succeed him as leader of the Free Democrats, Europe's largest Liberal party after the UK Liberal Democrats.

'The announcement of my candidature can only be the

first step to a renewal of the FDP in personnel and content,' Rösler said on 5 April.

Dr Rösler, who would also become Vice Chancellor, is expected to be voted in as party chairman at the FDP Congress in May 2011. Brought up in Germany after arriving as an orphan refugee from Vietnam, the quietly spoken but ferociously intelligent Rösler could be more effective than the German media expect.

The move follows the announcement by Guido Westerwelle that he will not run for another term as chairman. "It's time to allow a change in generation of the FDP and let them work on a new beginning," Westerwelle said. As Foreign Minister he is still part of the FDP and government team.

Change that works for Europe & for you

Davies forms 'Fish for the Future' as Watson hails end of "Discards"



A cross-party campaign group of European MPs has been formed to prevent the "hijack" of plans for radical reform of EU fisheries policies.

North West Lib Dem MEP Chris Davies took the initiative to create the 'Fish for the Future' group. He says its objective is to ensure that there are more fish in the sea and more jobs for fishermen.

With up to 80% of fisheries being managed unsustainably the European Commission intends to propose major policy reforms later this year.

EU Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki has already announced that she wants a science-led approach and aims to ban the wasteful practice of throwing back or 'discarding' fish into the sea, dead, when quotas have been exceeded. Fisheries management will be transferred from Brussels to regional organisations involving local fishermen, food companies

and environmentalists. But Chris Davies warns that the reforms are likely to face tough political opposition and could be hijacked. He said: "In many European waters there are too many boats chasing too few fish. Capacity must be reduced and that will be fiercely resisted. Our seas are capable of supporting many more fish than now exist after so much over-fishing."

Danger of short term thinking

"We cannot allow the agenda to be set by short term thinking that ignores the need to ensure that we have fish on the table in 50 or 100 years' time."

The MEP claims that the reforms have the support of all parties in Britain but faces likely challenges from MEPs and ministers representing Spain, France, Italy and Portugal. He said: "The Coalition Government's fisheries minister,



Richard Benyon, is arguing the case for change at every opportunity, but the extent of opposition he faces will become known only when the European Commission publishes the details of its plans."

New plans end discards

Meanwhile South West MEP Graham Watson, also welcomed the end of "discards" and looked forward to a reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

He said: "There are several options to reform the CFP on the table, including an effort based system and a catch quota system which would close complete areas of fishing grounds once stocks of a certain species have reached a maximum quota.

"While these policies have their advantages and disadvantages, all will end the disgraceful discard system, which was designed to conserve fish stocks but has backfired."

End of Banana War after 15 years

MEPs have voted to lower tariffs on Latin American bananas, bringing the 15 year-long banana war to a peaceful end.

For 15 years the EU has favoured bananas from developing countries over Latin American bananas sold mainly by American companies. The aim was to encourage economic development in poor countries, and make sure small banana farmers in Africa and the West Indies were able to generate income.

The tariff against Latin American bananas (previously \$176 a tonne) will be reduced, and in return legal action taken against the EU for breaking international trade rules will be dropped.

Lib Dem Euro MP Catherine Bearder, who sits on the European Parliament's international Trade Committee. commented, "Tariffs were put on Latin

American bananas so that small farmers in Africa and the West Indies could compete with the US industrial machine growing plantations in Latin America - without this help US companies would put farmers in the developing world out of business. However, the WTO has found that these preferences to developing countries are in breach of international trade rules so we have agreed to reduce them."

"The advantage is that UK consumers should find our bananas get cheaper thanks to more competition between American companies and African farmers.

"The downside is that income for banana farmers in both Europe and the developing world will go down."



After Lobbygate: How to rebuild trust in European politics



The so called 'Lobbygate' scandal - where it was alleged that four senior MEPs had taken money for tabling amendments to legislation after a Sunday Times investigation - has shocked the European Parliament. How can the fallout lead to reform so that European laws are made in a way that generates public confidence and trust? DIANA WALLIS MEP investigates ...

The European Parliament is much more transparent and accessible than many of Europe's national legislatures, but that cannot be an argument for complacency, especially in the light of the of the Sunday Times' revelations.

The Parliament and Commission are due to put into place in June 2011 a joint Transparency Register which will give far more information about who has access and influence on the Brussels policy making scene. Furthermore, given that the first three MEPs entrapped were all former government Ministers, the necessity for including the Council speaks for itself. Parliament, supported by the lobbyists

themselves, had always asked for this new register to be mandatory or obligatory. Perhaps now the Commission will listen. There will be now a new cross institutional Code of Conduct which all must sign up to.

The Sunday Times journalists entered on day passes and there is surely an argument for a system along the lines of 'three day passes - and then you are out!' - or rather have to apply for a long term badge and provide all the information required for full registration and adherence to the new code of conduct. The Declaration of Interest system for MEPs should be more regularly updated - with meaningful sanctions for non-compliance.

"We need a system where the public can see who MEPs are talking to in terms of influence on legislation."

This means some kind of 'legislative footprint'; it does not have to be a huge burden, we could just make it part of the template for every legislative report, and fill in the relevant diary entries. Likewise, some of us have long had misgivings about 'off the shelf' amendments from lobbyists. Of course they can be genuinely helpful, but

MEPs should also have access to an independent drafting service that individual members, whether rapporteur or not, can feel comfortable to consult.

It might also be helpful to have a number of elder members who can act as some kind of 'ethics committee' or mentors, providing an advisory channel for members concerned or unsure about situations they are dealing with.

Transparency is key

Many will also call for a ban on second jobs. This question should be approached with great care. The issue is not having a second job as such. The question should be is any additional employment or income fully declared and transparent? Secondly, does it put the MEP into a conflict of interest in respect of dealing with a particular legislative file or issue where further steps might be necessary?

So there is a potentially wide agenda to be considered in the aftermath of this damaging affair. However, there can be little doubt that the vast majority of MEPs are hardworking individuals operating to high standards in public life. What Parliament now needs to do is to develop a robust system that offers transparency and displays these standards to the outside world.

EU should back Hamas / Fatah deal – Davies

Lib Dem Euro MP Chris Davies, speaking while on a visit to Israel/Palestine, has urged the EU to back the reconciliation deal announced between Hamas and Fatah.



Chris Davies, a member of the European Parliament's Palestine Delegation and its delegation to Israel, spoke out on the deal while in Ramallah on April 27th.

He said: "The EU must welcome this reconciliation

that will allow Palestinians to speak with one voice. The EU must promise to work with all members of a new unity government, and must pledge to respect the democratic wishes of Palestinian voters when new elections are held, whatever the election result.

"The desire of European governments to do nothing that might be criticised by the USA and Israel has led to dreadful errors in the past.

"The double standards must end and we must give practical support to Palestinians determined to end Israel's illegal occupation of their land."

All year round LibDem ACTION in Europe



CAP: battle looms over green farm payments

George Lyon, Liberal Democrat MEP for Scotland, has predicted that a major battle lies ahead on whether direct EU payments to farmers should be 'greened up' and what form that greening should take.

Speaking at the Sentry Farming Conference in Cambridge, Mr Lyon said: "One of the key battles that lies ahead during reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is the so called greening of the direct payments to farmers.

"The European Parliament has made it clear that it believes there should be a greening of the direct payments focussed on the economic and environmental efficiency of the industry. This would ensure that agriculture contributes in the fight against climate change.

"Parliament's plan would encourage new techniques such as precision farming methods, min-till and longer grass rotations which are all designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and deliver a more competitive and sustainable yet intensive farming system which is able to meet the rising global demand for food. Most importantly,

the greening element should be a simple opt-in for farmers and not compulsory.

"The Commission's current plans would be compulsory, based on farmers carrying out a range of extra agri-environmental measures such as crop rotation and complying with the water framework directive. There is real concern that the Commission's proposals could run the risk of making European agriculture less efficient and less competitive in world markets.

Threat to food security is real

"I believe it is essential that the guiding principles of the reform must be focussed on creating a more competitive, more efficient and more sustainable agriculture. The CAP should be simple and easy to understand by both farmers, who have to comply with it, and consumers who have to fund it. There is a real danger that we could end up with a more complicated and less transparent CAP leading to a less efficient and less competitive agricultural industry. This would have disastrous effects on the ability of our farmers to compete in a global marketplace and meet the challenge of global food security."

Eurofile editor and FPC member Phil Bennion explains:



The CAP is split into two Pillars, the first consists mainly of the area-based Single Farm Payment, the second a raft of 'Rural Development' measures, including environmental schemes.

Lib Dem policy supports an increased role for Pillar Two and our view is that greening of the CAP is best achieved through this route.

However, other member states do not have the same experience as the UK in delivering high quality environmental programs through Pillar Two, so there seems to be a consensus developing to introduce more stringent environmental conditions to Pillar One.

It is vital that DEFRA minister Caroline Spelman engages fully in this process, even if we in the UK think that the Commission is pursuing the wrong policy. Mrs Spelman's task is to ensure that any new conditions are both workable and do not lead to a hike in food production costs.

Lyon welcomes devolved powers on GM crops

Scottish Euro MP and Lib Dem farming spokesman George Lyon has welcomed the European Commission's proposals to grant Member States and regional governments the powers to decide whether farmers can cultivate GM crops.

At the European Agriculture Committee Mr Lyon set out the changes he wanted to see to the proposal before it gets the go ahead.

He said: "It is essential that Member States wishing to use these new powers do so in a proportionate way, respecting freedom of choice for farmers while ensuring that they do nothing to undermine the decisions by the European Food Standards Agency on

safety of products. The handing back of power to Governments is a step in the right direction to break the deadlock in the EU over GM.

"It will give countries who wish to ban GM cultivation a proper legal basis to do so, while allowing those who wish to use the technology to go ahead."

Editors note: *It is unlikely that restricting trade in GMOs can be sustained under WTO rules. If Member State restrictions cover only cultivation of GMOs, rather than use, there will be no issue regarding the Single Market. Conversely, if individual Member States were to try to ban the use of GMOs, the Single Market principle would be challenged.*

Change that works for Europe & for you

Ludford concern that bank details for millions 'go to USA on the nod'

Lib Dem MEPs have voiced grave concern over vague safeguards for an EU deal to share SWIFT information on millions of bank transfers with America in the name of fighting terrorism.

The European Commission has published a positive assessment of the Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme agreement with the US which contradicts the verdict of a respected privacy watchdog.

The deal permits and regulates the sharing of 'SWIFT' European banking data for counterterrorism. The first agreement was rejected by MEPs due to serious data protection concerns, and a re-negotiated version with stricter rules on checks, data storage and redress for misuse was approved last July.

Data sent to US 'on the nod'

Europol was given a role in verifying that US data requests met rules for specific identification, necessity, proportionality and narrow scope. However its Joint Supervisory Board has told MEPs that it is impossible to verify whether Europol has done this job, not least because of a web of secrecy surrounding transfers.

Lib Dem European justice & human rights spokeswoman and London MEP Sarah Ludford (left) said: "It is a mystery how the

Commission can affirm that the oversight system has worked when Europol's own watchdog has said 'it is impossible to check' and that monthly bulk transfers seem to have been nodded through.

"This puts MEPs in an impossible position: whose version do we rely on in carrying out our duty of accountability?"

"If we are expected to approve future arrangements for transferring personal information, such as on airline passengers, we must have a stronger basis for knowing whose verdicts we can trust and why."

"We fully support data-sharing for targeted investigations. But it is obvious that the data searches amount to mass data-mining and profiling, which raises major worries about the consequences of casting suspicion on innocent people."



Parliament backs ALDE over rule of law in Russia

Following an initiative by ALDE, the European Parliament recently adopted a resolution on the rule of law in Russia.

ALDE leader **Guy Verhofstadt MEP** and **Kristiina Ojuland MEP** wrote an [open letter to President Putin](#) stating: "Russia is an important neighbour and has a duty, through its commitments as a member of the Council of Europe, to live up to European standards of democracy, fundamental rights and the Rule of Law".

Our Russian sister party **YABLOKO** welcomed these efforts to facilitate the establishment of the rule of law in their country and develop partner relations between the EU and Russia.

Yabloko leader **Sergei Mitrokhin** (pictured) said: "We have always advocated the view that the work should be based on universal human liberal values, rather than Realpolitik.

"Only on this basis can we build a democratic law-governed state, and create a sustainable



competitive partnership between the EU and Russia. The discussion in the European Parliament demonstrates that increasingly more European politicians have begun sharing this approach."

All year round LibDem ACTION in Europe

Liberals denounce Commission's weak energy plan as betrayal

Weak European Commission proposals on energy efficiency and lower greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 have been furiously criticised by ALDE spokespersons for energy and environment.

Commenting on the Energy Efficiency Plan 2011 and the Commission's so-called Roadmap for moving to a low carbon economy in 2050, **Lena Ek (Centre Party, Sweden)**, ALDE spokesperson on the Industry, Research and Environment Committee, said:

"The Commission admits that we are about to be leapfrogged by emerging economies such as China and India, which invest 48% and 35% of their GDP in the low carbon technologies



and infrastructure, compared to Europe's meagre 19%. Yet the Commission is not prepared to put more ambitious proposals for our energy future on the table.

"It is peculiar that the Commission does not propose cutting greenhouse gases by 30% by 2020 when its own calculations clearly show that is more cost effective to reduce emissions sooner, in particular by making energy savings.

"All the arguments are there, but they simply refuse to put the proposals forward."

Rabbit caught in headlights

An angry **Chris Davies (Lib Dem, UK)**, ALDE spokesperson on the Environment Committee added: "The Commission has today demonstrated all the courage and conviction of a rabbit caught in headlights and about to be run over.

"With fuel prices rising and set to stay high energy efficiency targets should be made legally binding now.

"Not to insist upon this, amounts to a betrayal of Europe's interests."

"Short term concerns have been put before the needs of our long term future. European development has been condemned to stay in the slow lane, certain to be overtaken by the fast lane Asian economies.

"By opting for complacency and delay we could hardly have been let down more if the Commission were acting on behalf of the Chinese Government."



UK opt-in to new directive is bad news for traffickers

Delighted Lib Dem MEPs have welcomed a decision by the UK Coalition government to 'opt in' to a new European directive which will help Europe's police forces fight human trafficking.

The UK did not take part in negotiations but is satisfied with the final text of the Trafficking Directive.

Liberal Democrat European justice & human rights spokeswoman Sarah Ludford MEP, who campaigned hard for the UK to opt in, said: "I congratulate the Home Secretary Theresa May in championing this decision of the Lib Dem-Conservative coalition government.

"It is welcome bad news for traffickers as it will greatly strengthen police and prosecutors across Europe in getting these despicable criminals who exploit people for profit behind bars."

"I'm glad that I and other MEPs were able to play a key role in delivering a workable EU law. UK participation has been a strong LibDem objective since UK absence would hobble cross-border efforts and leave the impression that this scourge was not a top British priority.

"The decision to put the UK once again at the forefront of the international effort to stamp out this malicious trade demonstrates the success of the coalition government's pragmatic approach to EU cooperation in justice and home affairs which LibDems pressed for."



Change that works for Europe & for you

Reinvigorating the EU Single Market



by Julia Bateman

With the 20th anniversary of the Single Market looming the EU institutions are at last focused on re-invigorating the internal market.

This process started with the Commission's Single Market Act (launched last October) and a series of debates and reports in the European Parliament. Despite its name, the Act is not a legislative measure in itself but an array of 50 initiatives that the Commission hopes will reinvigorate the European economy.

It deals with, amongst other things, company law, tax, competition and dispute resolution. The parallel EU Citizenship Report consulted upon identification of steps to remove obstacles created by national boundaries to the exercise of citizens' rights e.g. free movement rights, electoral rights and citizenship and family law and children's rights. Not all of these are new and many have been on the table for years. Areas of debate however have included workers rights, free movement rules, access to justice and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

At a public hearing held in February entitled "Single Market - Time to Act!" the debate was split along the lines of: good governance in the

Single Market; strong sustainable and equitable growth; and placing EU citizens at the heart of the Single Market. Commissioner for Internal Market and Services Michel Barnier underlined the need to stay true to the core principles of the Single Market – competitiveness and growth. Commission President Barroso called for a final "ambitious" Act with a balance between growth and the social dimension.

50 priorities means none at all

It became clear during the hearing that having 50 priorities means no priorities at all! The Commission agreed to pare down the proposals to a "top ten" (or 12!) to focus activity and asked those responding to the consultation to do the same.

The clear message from the debate was the desire for increased growth and employment in this financially difficult period. Indeed, Barroso had set out in his introduction that if properly implemented the Single Market Act could generate a 4% rise in EU GDP over the next ten years. Opinions diverged over how to achieve this growth, but some indication of which proposals would make the top ten did emerge.

In April the European Parliament gave its view and three resolutions were passed relating to the "three pillars" of the Single Market Act -

governance and

partnerships, enterprises and growth and making the single market work for European citizens.

Commissioner Barnier has since appeared before the Internal Market Committee presenting his latest communication, entitled as "Single Market Act: 12 levers to boost growth and strengthen confidence". These include: access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), citizens' mobility, intellectual property rights, consumer confidence, the free movement of services, networks in energy, telecomms and transport, the digital single market, social business, taxation (including a common consolidated corporate tax base), social cohesion, the regulatory environment for business and public procurement procedures.

Many of the key priorities were outlined at the hearing in February, this time with a timetable. It is now up to the Hungarian Presidency in its final months to urge its counterparts to make these goals a legislative reality and hand over to Poland to make further progress.

Julia Bateman was PPC for Gedling in 2010. She is a member of the East Midland Regional Executive and works in Brussels.

Checklist for a better Single Market: Sarah Ludford reports

The European Parliament has passed three reports on what it wants to see in the forthcoming overhaul of the operation of the EU single market - which has led to many benefits for European businesses and consumers.

*In the next few years, some of the improvements the European Parliament wants are: **easier arrangements for professional qualifications to be recognised abroad - so that you can move***

*to Italy or Spain and still practise your trade or profession; **private pensions to be fully portable around the EU - so you can retire in the South of France and still get your British pension; online shopping and other forms of e-commerce to be easier across the EU; abolishing unnecessary bank charges and making such charges more transparent, and a price cap on mobile internet when abroad.***

All year round LibDem ACTION in Europe

Bowles backs single European patent

Sharon Bowles MEP, who chairs the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee and is also a patent attorney, has called for 'enhanced cooperation' on a single European patent and welcomed Euro MPs' strong approval for the idea.

A European patent that covers the whole of the single market rather than the current system which requires patents to be registered in European countries separately and at greater cost has been on the table for a long time.

However, while the creation of a single European patent has gained support in the European Parliament, the issue of language has become a sticking point for some countries, including Spain and Italy, who do not want the official languages of the proposed single European patent to be English, French and German.

Sharon Bowles MEP, who is the European Parliament's only patent attorney, said: "It is a benefit for the UK to be a part of enhanced cooperation on this issue, so that UK business gets the best possible deal.

"A single European patent would be good for UK industry, particularly for Research and Development, as it would reduce costs.

"We are awaiting a decision from the European Court of Justice concerning its role in interpretation. However, I do not see any reason for that to cause the UK to change its mind and opt-out.

"There are already references to the ECJ in other areas of intellectual property, notably trademarks and designs. Not to be in the system would be immensely damaging to UK industry."

EU action drives down car emissions

EU action to reduce carbon emissions from cars is succeeding, according to the latest figures.

A new study from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders shows CO2 emissions from UK cars fell by 3.5% in 2010, one of the highest reductions on record.

Fiona Hall MEP, who helped formulate the European-level legislation that had led to the production of greener cars commented; "Legislation at EU



level is driving companies to innovate and introduce more climate-friendly cars. Not only does this help the environment, it makes a real difference to costs for drivers too."

Lib Dems back Which? complaint over card surcharges

Lib Dem Euro MP Sharon Bowles, who chairs the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, is backing a 'super-complaint' by consumer watchdog Which? calling for excessive debit and credit card surcharges to be scrapped.

Surcharges, sometimes called 'handling fees', 'booking charges', or 'administration fees', are frequently incurred by consumers when making payments with debit or credit cards online. This additional cost can vary and is often not made clear until the end of the purchase, creating a disparity between the price advertised and the price paid.

According to the Which? super-complaint some retailers, including certain budget airlines, are

profiting from surcharges. Research shows that the actual cost to budget airlines for a debit card transaction is between 10p and 20p and between 1% and 2% of the value of the ticket for a credit card transaction but, in the case of Ryanair for example, a family of four would incur a £40 surcharge for return flights. In some cases surcharges are incurred for each leg of a journey.

Sharon Bowles MEP said: "Understandably, retailers being charged a fee by banks to process debit and credit card transactions want to pass that cost on to the card-using consumer. However, it is wrong for retailers such as Ryanair to profit by charging consumers more, by way of a surcharge, than the original cost of the transaction."

“A European Life – from war to peace”

Memoirs, by Michael Tracy

“To those who think Europe matters, and even more so, to those who don’t”...

Michael Tracy describes a life lived in several countries, in various international contexts, which has given him a unique perspective on the development of Europe after a war which scarred the culture of a continent.

He grew up in Scotland during 1939-45 and after gaining a scholarship to Fettes College in Edinburgh, he then won another to Cambridge University (studying Modern Languages, then Economics). Afterwards he worked in international organisations and for ten years was a Director in the Council Secretariat of the European Union. He also pursued an academic career, writing on agricultural policy and economics and lecturing in various European universities, including Wye College in England, the College of Europe in Bruges and what at the time was still the “Karl Marx” University of Economics in Budapest.

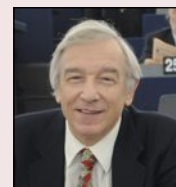
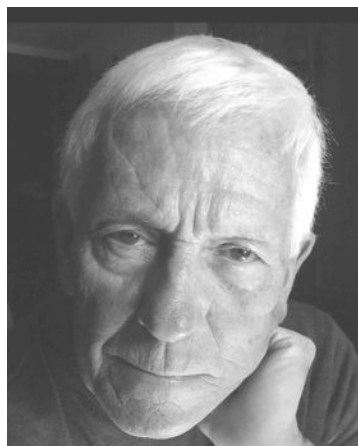
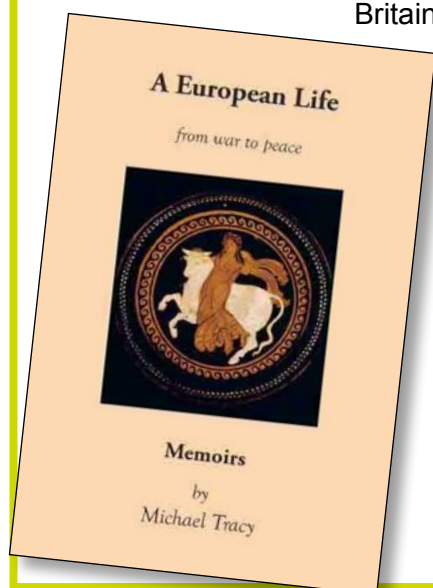
In Moscow in 1991 he witnessed at close quarters the collapse of the Soviet Union, and subsequently was involved in a new institute in St. Petersburg. Throughout the 1990s he had advisory and teaching roles in the countries of Central/Eastern Europe during their transition to market economies and preparation for their accession to the EU.

His final chapter assesses the issues currently facing both the European Union and Russia. Taking the story up to May 2010, he discusses the prospects for the eurozone, and the implications of

Britain’s new coalition government for Britain’s relations with the EU (a subject which he has followed from the outset in the late 1950s).

This book is not a history: it is a lively and often humorous account of Michael Tracy’s many experiences, in which personal contacts figure largely. Nor is it a tract for or against the European Union; it sheds a more human light on proceedings in “Brussels”.

Published July 2010. 150 pages. ISBN 978-2-930590-00-4 From [Amazon](#) at £7.99 (or less); also an E-book from [W.H. Smith](#), etc. For more information see www.HermitageBook.net



Newton Dunn in India for trade talks

Bill Newton Dunn, Lib Dem MEP for the East Midlands, was part of a six MEP European Parliament delegation to India in April.

The group met counterparts in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of the Indian Parliament, to discuss a new deal to expand economic ties between the EU and India, which is growing rapidly and offers huge export potential. The talks also discussed measures to fight Climate Change and steps to combat child labour.

Bill said: “The visit is important because negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between the EU and India are nearing the final stages. The mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement, India’s first, should generate two-way trade worth 100 billion euros. But it must first be ratified by both the Lok Sabha and by the European Parliament - but not by any national parliaments in Europe.”

Van Rompuy will answer written MEP questions

East Anglian MEP Andrew Duff has welcomed the decision by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, to answer written questions from MEPs about his 'own political activities'.

Andrew Duff said: “This will increase transparency though Mr Van Rompuy insists that he is not accountable to the Parliament and that he cannot answer questions about the European Council.

“This may lead to some strange answers. But he clearly recognises the importance of Parliament and that there is a risk of a democratic problem if the Council operates in obscurity. This is a small but significant step forward.”



Lib Dem EuroFILE

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Edited by Phil Bennion, the *Eurofile* magazine is supported by ELDR - the alliance of European Liberal, Democrat and Reformist political parties.

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