



# Lib Dem EuroFILE



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## Taking an axe to illegal logging



**Urged on by Lib Dem MEPs, the European Parliament has taken action to save rainforests by banning illegally logged timber from the European market and setting up strict penalties for those caught trying to sell it.**

Until now, a loophole in European law has allowed the import of illegally felled timbers worth €3bn without fear of prosecution.

North West Euro MP Chris Davies, who has mounted a six year campaign to try and halt the destruction of rainforests, sees the move as a major victory.

Chris Davies said: "The lawyers kept telling me it couldn't be done, but unless people who buy timber are forced to check the source we will never curb these criminals.

"But pressure was kept up and now EU governments have agreed to try and halt the destruction of forests."

Illegal logging is estimated to represent 20 to 40% of worldwide industrial wood production, and contributes heavily to carbon emissions and the loss of biodiversity by



destroying forests. Huge sums of money are made by corrupt businesses who ignore national laws. It deprives often poor governments of billions of pounds of revenue every year and can cause violent conflict.

### Strict fines and traceability

WWF estimates that around €3bn of illegal timber from places like the Congo Basin and Indonesia reaches the EU. The new rules impose strict fines for those caught first placing illegal timber on the European market and establishes traceability through the whole supply chain.

South West Lib Dem MEP Graham Watson commented; "Illegal logging causes environmental, economic and human devastation right across the world. The EU has taken an important step. We must now ensure that member states enforce this ban properly.

"By saying "no" to these timber cowboys in Europe we can do our bit to support developing countries and protect forests ravaged by illegal logging."

Watson said the new law would help responsible

timber producers based in Britain and the rest of Europe to compete.

"The illegal timber trade depresses prices by up to 16%. This action will also support responsible timber producers who employ sustainable and legal methods."

MEP for Scotland George Lyon added; "Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned by the impact that the felling of huge swathes of rainforests has on the environment. These regulations will ensure that people can have complete confidence that wood products they buy are produced from sustainable sources."

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Lib Dem European Group

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# EDITORIAL:

## by LDEG chair Phil Bennion

### Don't get the Coalition Blues

It is often said that junior partners in coalitions get all of the blame and none of the credit for government measures. Our current experiences seem to back up this mantra. We must raise our game in getting out our message if we are to garner more support from our participation in government. Can we learn anything from our sister parties in Europe, some of which are regular coalition members?

The current opinion poll ratings of the FDP in Germany are hardly encouraging, having dipped below 5% in recent weeks. They have certainly made mistakes and plans to reduce the deficit in Germany are even less popular than in Britain. Their senior partners in the CDU/CSU have also fallen in popularity since the election last year. However, the FDP are keen to work with the Liberal Democrats so we can learn from each other. A joint event is being organised in London in November, which should be both fascinating and productive.

We must also look to other liberal coalition partners across Europe e.g. in Sweden, Finland and Denmark, some of whom have a long and successful track record. A Liberal-led coalition has taken power in the Netherlands after their election left the VVD as the biggest party for the first time. Our other Dutch sister party D66 also made big gains.

At home it is important that we don't succumb to the Coalition Blues. We have to take the positive opportunities

of being in government, stress our distinctive achievements and counter Labour attempts to undermine us. We need to remind people of Labour's record and the cuts and tax increases they had already decided on and keep campaigning. We have time on our side, but we need to use it well.

### LI Gaza Resolution passed, but no real change

In the last issue we covered the dire situation in Gaza that led to the ill-fated attempt to break the Israeli blockade. Our Eurofile article was used by Lib Dem International Relations Committee Chair Robert Woodthorpe Browne to help construct an Urgency Resolution at the Liberal International Executive in Berlin criticising the Israeli action.

This was passed overwhelmingly, with only the Israeli delegation voting against. Despite initial indications that the Israelis were willing to change the terms of the blockade, they still consider building materials to be potential military goods. This is unacceptable. The abject poverty in Gaza is a result of the blockade. Gaza is a predominantly urban community and can only make a living through trade with the outside world.

Chris Davies, the only British politician to gain access to Gaza during last year's assault by Israel, met privately in the European Parliament recently with John Ging, the head of operations for the UN Relief and Works Agency in Gaza. Chris says that Ging described the Israeli blockade as "profoundly counter productive" and claimed that it strengthened the position of criminals and extremists in the territory. We must maintain pressure on Israel to lift the blockade.

### CAP vote overwhelming

George Lyon has received the overwhelming backing of the European Parliament for his own initiative report (See "Crucial Weeks for CAP Reform", Eurofile 4), which sets out the future reform of the

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP is the biggest single item of expenditure for the EU and George has put the ALDE group in a strong position to guide the changes that will come into effect after 2013.

The Commission will now draw up detailed proposals for reform. Commissioner Dacian Cioloş has already welcomed the Lyon report, which forms the basis of the Parliament's position. With the re-emergence of food security as an issue, the reform proposals are more cautious than we might have predicted five years ago, but they are consistent with both ELDR and Lib Dem policy. It is now highly likely that the Commission will propose reforms along these lines, including the replacement of historically based agricultural payments with ones based on objective criteria. The big obstacle will be the Council of Ministers, where member states that are the biggest losers are likely to dig in their heels.

### Eurosceptic? Only if I'm up for Election!!

David Cameron has now followed William Hague into the Hall of Fame of "Eurosceptic" Conservative politicians who make broadly pro-European speeches whilst abroad. His call for certain EU member states to abandon their reticence over Turkish accession was both admirable and courageous.

This is encouraging. It follows William Hague's pledge to take a positive and constructive role in Europe whilst visiting Germany with Nick Clegg. This was very much a topic of discussion between delegates at the Liberal International Executive meeting in Berlin on the following day. I proffered the explanation that Hague's "Euroscepticism" had always lacked conviction and was nothing more than a ploy to chime with the UK tabloid press and gain electoral advantage. Time will tell.

*Phil Bennion, Editor*

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# Right to translation a leap forward for European justice

Lib Dem Euro MP Sarah Ludford has hailed as a "leap forward for European justice" the European Parliament vote to give all EU citizens a right to interpretation and translations when questioned by police or tried in another EU country.

The London MEP is Lib Dem European justice and human rights spokeswoman and negotiated with the EU presidency on the issue on behalf of the European Parliament.

Sarah Ludford said: "These measures will deliver real justice to some of our most vulnerable citizens. There are too many cases where people find themselves accused of a crime abroad, but are unable to understand the details of the accusation or the proceedings that are applied against them."

"When people need clarity most, they can feel faced by an 'Alice in Wonderland' justice system where nothing is certain or makes sense.

***"Parliament voted for effective, efficient and transparent justice. Now it is for member states to make it happen."***

Lib Dem MEP Graham Watson hit out at UKIP MEPs for claiming injustice on behalf of those extradited to face charges on the continent, but failing to support a measure that would guarantee them extra rights.

"I find it appalling that UKIP MEPs are willing to make political footballs out of individual cases, yet refuse to back measures that ensure the accused has rights. Their actions expose UKIP's hypocrisy and eagerness to exploit the anxiety of those involved and their families. UKIP have shown that their interest lies in PR, not real justice."

"Lib Dems will continue to work behind the scenes to support those facing charges abroad. We will help build upon this vote to help secure further guaranteed rights for suspects and their families, and also an agreement on pre-trial detention and bail."

The rights to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings directive can now pass into EU law, having been approved by EU governments and now the European Parliament. It is the first EU criminal justice legislation to be negotiated under co-decision with MEPs rather than decided by national parliaments alone.



## Could you be an ELDR Congress Delegate?

The party is still short of a full complement of delegates to represent us at the ELDR congress this autumn. It is important that we have sufficient delegates to be able to activate all of our votes, **writes Phil Bennion**.

Congress this year is held in Helsinki on Thursday and Friday October 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, with a reception the night before. There are direct flights on BA from Heathrow and Easyjet from Manchester. Take a long weekend in an interesting city and serve the party at the same time. Contact Natalie Darby in the Lib Dem International Office for details; [Natalie.Darby@libdems.org.uk](mailto:Natalie.Darby@libdems.org.uk) or call her at Lib Dem HQ on 0207 222 7999.

**STOP PRESS: The deadline to confirm names on our delegation is August 13th, so please act now if you would like to go.**

# Huge EU green investments in UK welcomed by Euro MPs

**Lib Dem Euro MEPs Andrew Duff and Sarah Ludford have both found cause to welcome huge green investment from the EU in their regions.**

Mr Duff welcomed the decision by the EU to invest £450 million in Ford's research facility at Dunton in Essex.

The East of England MEP said: "The UK has been running behind our EU partners in developing green technologies. So the European Investment Bank's decision is doubly welcome.

"Ford's innovative programme is exactly the kind of activity which will create the productive jobs of the future. The EU has made a vote of confidence in Ford and in the East of England which Liberal Democrats very much welcome."

The EIB is also coming forward with a £250m loan for the London Array wind farm project in the Thames Estuary. London Lib Dem Euro MP Sarah Ludford

commented; "This European funding is an excellent 'green gift' for Londoners. The windfarm will make the most of our infamous British weather to provide climate-friendly clean energy for the capital.

## No risk of oil spills

"We need more renewable energy projects such as this one, and the gradual decommissioning of old dirty coal power stations. Not only does

wind power provide a carbon-free energy supply, it also carries no risk of deep water oil spills!"

The EU funding is doubly important at a time when UK government spending is stretched by the coalition's attempts to close the deficit.

Eurofile has already spoken to Danny Alexander urging him to spare energy efficiency measures and renewable technologies from cuts in the autumn spending review.



● Catherine Bearder MEP and RMC Vanessa McPake in Milton Keynes where they have launched a green driving scheme with charge points for electric cars and bicycles.

## Liberals welcome plan for Iceland to join EU

**Liberals are strongly supporting negotiations for Iceland to join the European Union.**

The European Council of Ministers has agreed to officially make Iceland an EU Candidate Country and open accession negotiations.

**Pat the Cope Gallagher** (picture), Irish Liberal MEP and Chairman of the European Parliament delegation to Iceland, said: "These accession negotiations will undoubtedly be tough but Iceland has already completed 22 out of the 35 accession chapters of negotiation."



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# Conservatives fail in bid to block honest food labels

**George Lyon, Lib Dem European Agriculture spokesman, has welcomed moves by the European Parliament to introduce 'country of provenance' food labels which aim to give consumers honest and accurate information about produce.**

At the European Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg, MEPs rejected amendments put forward by Conservatives that would have blocked the plan to give consumers information about where food is from, not where it was packaged.

In a series of close votes on the controversial Food Labelling Directive, MEPs decided to outlaw the practice of repackaging and reprocessing meat, fish, dairy or vegetable foodstuffs bought from all over the world and then branding it as 'Made in England' or another EU country. However Parliament rejected a move for 'traffic light' colour code labelling to show nutritional value and the carbon footprint of foodstuffs.

Commenting, Mr Lyon said: "Consumers want to have confidence that food labelling gives information about where produce is

sourced, not where it is packaged. Too often, the small print reveals that country of origin is not what the consumer expected. This type of misleading information must end. I was surprised that my Conservative colleagues did not back the industry's view that honest labelling should be introduced."

## **Help for consumers and farmers**

The campaign for honest labelling has been promoted by the Liberal Democrats for a number of years and was championed in the last parliament by West Midlands MEP Liz Lynne. She was delighted with the move for provenance labelling.

She said: "Our farmers and others in the EU have stringent animal welfare rules which are not followed by many other countries - now it will be much easier for consumers who support these rules to ensure they buy food which conforms to them.

"Producers who want to export to us will also be encouraged to adopt higher standards to compete. It is a win win situation for farmers, consumers and animals too."

Before the vote Liz discussed the plans for provenance labelling with NFU Deputy President Meurig



Raymond (above), who also strongly backed the plan for provenance labelling..

South East MEP Catherine Bearder, another Lib Dem Euro MP with a farming background, was equally passionate: "Whether you are concerned about quality, ethics, or food miles, the right to know and the right to choose should be yours.

"Many people choose to buy from British farmers because of our high animal welfare standards. These standards cost money so it's important our farmers see a reward. No longer will consumers be ripped off by thinking they're buying British when they're not."

## **Devolving GM crop planting decisions raises questions**

Lib Dem Farming spokesman George Lyon MEP has asked the European Commission to clarify its plans to give Member States and regional governments the power to permit planting of GM crops, moving away from a common policy for all 27 EU nations. While welcoming the Commission's intention, Mr Lyon has asked how the plans will work in practice.

Commenting, Mr Lyon said: "There are still many questions that the Commission must answer as to how delegating responsibility for GM planting to Member States will work in a single market. If different countries allow GM crops to be grown will they be able to be traded or not? Creating a two-tier system could cause real confusion and ultimately be to the detriment of both the technology and the agricultural industry."

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# Bankers' bonuses capped by MEPs



**Lib Dem Euro MPs have backed moves to crack down on bankers' bonuses that encourage risky financial decisions and helped cause the recent financial meltdown.**

Banks were also told to hold reserves to guard against risky investments so they are not forced to fall back onto the taxpayer.

Lib Dem MEP Sharon Bowles, Chair of the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, successfully tabled the amendments in the European Parliament calling for top bankers' bonuses to be paid in "contingent capital", which can be converted back into cash should a risky investment cause a bank to run into difficulty, rather than in cash or shares.

***Therefore if a bank suffers big losses it would be the bonuses and pensions of top bankers and traders under threat before taxpayers' money.***

Upfront cash bonuses will be capped to between 20-30%, with a large part of the bonus being dependent on the long-term performance of an investment.

## **Good riddance**

Sharon Bowles said: "I want banking to return to the idea that existed in private banks when partners had their own money on the line and had a vested interest in the long-term health of the bank. If bankers and traders want to leave and go to other jurisdictions, it just shows that they have no confidence in their own performance. To those that would leave I say good riddance."

Graham Watson explained; "The size and complexity of banks means that European countries had to take this step together but in doing so, have set an important benchmark for the rest of the world."

Lib Dem group leader Fiona Hall MEP backed up this view saying: "Since 2008 the public has had to put up with seeing top bankers

continuing to take home millions in bonuses, while they see their own homes repossessed.

"This landmark piece of legislation will put an end to the unjustifiable bonus culture that has disgraced the banking sector. The taxpayer will no longer have to pick up the tab for bankers who bring down the financial institutions they work for through short-term risk taking and greed.

***"The new rules mean that bonuses will become much more closely tied to a bank's health and performance. This will be the end to excessive bonuses and unjustifiable risk-taking in Europe."***

"It beggars belief that UKIP and the BNP did not see fit to support these measures, I wonder what their constituents would have to say on the matter. It seems that UKIP and the BNP are only too happy to keep throwing money after casinos bankers whilst the public has to pick up the bill."



## **Sharon Bowles named as most influential woman in European finance**

**South East MEP Sharon Bowles has been named the most influential woman in European finance by the Financial News.**

This year's Top 100 list features a number of regulatory chiefs tasked with preventing a new financial crisis. Top is Deutsche Bank's investment banking chief Anshu Jain, while Bank of England boss Mervyn King came in fifth. However, despite ongoing efforts to make finance more gender-balanced, only

four women appear on the list, with Sharon leading the pack. The Lib Dem MEP, who chairs the European Parliament's powerful Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, said: "I am flattered. There has been a flurry of new regulation this year on the back of the financial crisis and my work to rein in bankers' bonuses was passed in to EU law.

"I will continue to do my best to help shape new, effective and fair legislation to help prevent another financial crisis."

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# Duff welcomes launch of EU Diplomatic Service

**Lib Dem calls for 'Active Common Policy' as criticism mounts of Baroness Ashton, Labour's nominee as EU High Representative**

**Welcoming the launch of the new European External Action Service, Lib Dem Euro MP Andrew Duff has called for the EU to start a real debate on the content of foreign policy.**

"Now we have Europe speaking with one voice, we have to decide precisely what it is we want to say", he told the Parliament's plenary sitting in Strasbourg.

"What we now need is an argument. If we fail to compare, contrast and contest each other's national foreign policies there will never be a common foreign, security and defence policy."

Addressing British Commissioner Catherine Ashton, who will run the new diplomatic service, Duff said: "It's time for you to pose some tough questions to European governments. For example, why do five EU states still refuse to recognise the independence of Kosovo? Why is Greece allowed to

block the emergence of Macedonia as a state? Why is there still cold war between Turkey and Cyprus?"

Duff also called on Catherine Ashton to propose some answers, too -- "for instance, by launching a concerted civilian-military Common Security and Defence Policy mission to combat international organised crime"

## **'Deafening silence' slammed**

Scotland's Lib Dem MEP George Lyon was less guarded in his criticism of Baroness Ashton.

"In December, Baroness Ashton said: 'I believe that a lot can be achieved with quiet diplomacy.'

***"Unfortunately, Lady Ashton seems to have mistaken quiet diplomacy for deafening silence."***

"In seven months in the job, she has been faced with a humanitarian disaster in Haiti, international furore after Israel boarded aid ships on

their way to Gaza, and most recently a huge oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

In all of these situations we haven't heard a peep, not a whimper, from the person charged with representing the EU on the world stage. This has left many MEPs wondering why they voted to confirm Lady Ashton's candidacy in January."

The creation of the External Action Service is one result of the Lisbon treaty and will comprise existing officials from the external relations units of the European Commission, officials from the Council of Ministers secretariat and national civil servants. The EAS will replace Commission delegations in third countries and will allow national foreign ministries to pool their resources and intelligence.



## **Lib Dems lobby for a fairer deal for small fishing boats**

**Lib Dem Euro MP Catherine Bearder has taken a delegation from the fishing industry to meet the European Commissioner Maria Damanaki to press the case for a fairer deal for small boat fishing fleets.**

The delegation protested to the Commissioner that quota allocations in the UK are distorted as small boats make up 93% of our fleet but receive just 3% of the quota.

The Commission must not allow a situation to arise again where a member state can discriminate so heavily against an important sector of this industry, they argued.

Catherine said: "There is a clear bias towards large organisations and large boats. If our fishing industry is to maintain fixed quotas we must ensure they are fair.

"This meeting was just the first step towards rebalancing this unfairness. "I am delighted that the Commissioner

gave us her support but we must keep up the pressure to see through the reforms we need."

Scottish Lib Dem MEP George Lyon has also lobbied the Fisheries Commissioner to ensure fairer quotas.

He demanded that the Commission should ensure that recommendations on next year's fishing quotas are based on accurate science and not on the incomplete data currently held by ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea).



# Cloned meat kept off European dinner tables

**Euro MPs have thrown out proposals by the EU Commission to allow meat from cloned animals and their offspring onto the European market.**

Liberal Democrat Group Leader **Fiona Hall** is among a majority of MEPs calling for a ban on imported food and semen from cloned animals.

Current EU rules only allow third-generation or later offspring from cloned animals to be sold for food, but no such rules apply in countries like America, Canada, Argentina and Brazil. These nations are major exporters of beef and semen to the EU and in all of them cloning is widespread and unregulated. Concerned by

these reports, Euro MPs asked the EU Commission to come up with proposals to expressly ban food from cloned animals and their descendants.

North East Lib Dem MEP Fiona Hall said: "No safety concerns have been identified with meat produced from cloned animals. However, cloning animals raises serious issues about animal welfare and reduction of biodiversity.

## **Listen to public opinion**

"Cloned animals suffer disproportionately highly from illnesses, malformations and premature death. MEPs have been calling for proper regulation for years: it's high time the Commission listened to the European Parliament and public opinion on this

issue. MEPs are rightly asking for a moratorium on all sales of food derived from cloning until these issues have been properly addressed."



## **E-Justice: EU web portal launched**

**The first version of the European "e-Justice" web portal has been launched following an informal meeting of the Justice and Internal Affairs Council.**

For some years now, the intention behind the e-Justice project has been to develop the use of information and communications technologies in the field of European justice. The web portal launched in July was developed jointly by the Commission and by Member States with input from Parliament. It is hoped to be a focal point for citizens and lawyers to access information on justice matters in the EU.

Yorkshire Lib Dem Euro MP Diana Wallis, Vice-President of the Parliament and former rapporteur on the issue, gave a keynote speech at the launch event.

She said: "I am delighted that the first version of the EU's e-Justice portal is finally being launched. Citizens and businesses increase their cross-border trade and activity in large part due to the Internet - however when things go wrong, things get much more complicated."

"This e-Justice portal should act as a signpost and resource in such cases, and should be developed as soon as possible into an ambitious electronic interface between citizens and justice systems and between judges and practitioners in different Member States. The objective is to increase access to justice in the Internal Market, to reduce legal costs and to do away with language barriers."

Visit the e-Justice Portal at: <https://e-justice.europa.eu>



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# Liz Lynne hails coalition axe for compulsory retirement age

**Britain's coalition Government has confirmed it will scrap the compulsory retirement age, a change long championed by Lib Dem Euro MP Liz Lynne and Age UK charity campaigners.**

Chancellor George Osborne has confirmed that the coalition will move 'quickly' to phase out the Default Retirement Age, preventing staff from being sacked just because they reach a certain age while still capable of doing their job.

West Midlands Euro MP Liz Lynne has campaigned with charities such as Help the Aged for many years on the issue, both in Westminster and in the European Parliament.

She said: "I am delighted the campaign has succeeded at last. This rule is a ridiculous piece of discrimination against older people that successive governments did nothing about. This is another plus for the Coalition, where party dogma has been set aside so issues can be looked at afresh. "Abolition will end the sudden cliff

edge of retirement that forces people to stop working at a certain age whether they want to or not, while maintaining an age at which people can receive a pension.

***"It is economic madness to force experienced workers to retire before their time and stop paying taxes. It is also totally unfair to get rid of staff just because they are 65."***

The pension age will still be set by government, but people will have flexibility on whether they want to keep working.

Liz added: "The test for those who want to carry on will be how capable they are of doing the job, not how old they are."

## **Value of part time working**

Liz Lynne recently co-sponsored a European Parliament Declaration on the issue.

She added: "It makes sense to move quickly when there are so many pressures on the budget and on pensions. It seems the Chancellor has realised the economic value of encouraging the option of part time working, which people might choose to do

for a few years in the run up to full retirement.

"Labour's approach to this issue was very different. In the so-called Heyday case when Age Concern and Help the Aged sought judicial review, backed by the European Commission, Labour ministers fought tooth and nail to keep the rule in the High Court.

***"Labour were reactionary while the Coalition is being progressive."***



***Liz Lynne has long campaigned with charities and others against mandatory retirement ages - (from left) Alvaro Oliveira, Legal and policy officer for the antidiscrimination unit of the Commission, Liz, and Richard Baker, Chair of the AGE anti-discrimination group.***



## **Kiviniemi becomes new leader of Keskusta and Prime Minister of Finland**

**Mari Kiviniemi was elected new leader of Finnish ELDR member party Keskusta at the party congress in Lahti.**

We congratulate the newly appointed leader and thank retiring Finnish Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen, for the dedication he has shown to European liberalism for almost a decade as both Prime Minister and party leader.

European Liberals trust that the good cooperation with Keskusta will continue with Mrs Kiviniemi, who also becomes the new Prime Minister.

Fluent in several languages including German and English and equipped with extensive ministerial competence, she is well placed to continue Matti Vanhanen's successful years.

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# Liberals obtain key concessions over new SWIFT agreement

**Thanks to Liberal Euro MPs, the European Parliament won key concessions over the new SWIFT agreement on transferring bank customers' data to American law enforcers.**

In particular, the European Commission and Council are committed to establishing an equivalent EU system that will filter the bank transfer data of EU citizens before agreeing to US data transfer requests.

A definitive timetable will soon be fixed for replacing the current US system (reliant on bulk transfer of European data) with a genuine European mechanism, which will fully respect data privacy and civil liberties without undermining the fight against terrorism.

**Alexander Alvaro (FDP, Germany, pictured right)**, EP rapporteur and chief negotiator for Parliament on the agreement declared: "Parliament has

stood up for citizens' rights to privacy by insisting that the current transfer of bulk data via Swift will be replaced by a properly controlled European data transfer system."

South West Lib Dem MEP Graham Watson added: "The anniversary of the 7/7 bombings focused everyone's minds on the need to work together to tackle terrorism. However, in seeking to win this fight, we must not sacrifice our commitment to democracy and civil liberties; otherwise we will lose the war before the battle is even over."

"Using new Lisbon Treaty powers, MEPs were able to stop EU governments transferring private bank data to the US in bulk.

"Liberals successfully negotiated a package that balances security and EU privacy standards. We can now confidently get on with tackling those individuals who threaten our liberties."



## Young liberals gather in Liverpool to discuss a liberal economy

**Liberal Youth, the Lib Dems' youth wing which is also a member of LYMEC, has hosted a seminar for young liberals from all over Europe on how to deliver a liberal economy.**

The event in Liverpool discussed how local government can deliver for citizens while at the same time keeping budgets balanced and stressing the local perspective.

The nearly week-long seminar "*Liberal Economy in Local Governance*" was supported by the ALDE group in the Committee of the Regions and organized in co-operation with LYMEC member organization Liberal Youth from the UK.



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# EU countries must recognise Kosovo as independent state

**Lib Dem MEPs are calling for Kosovo to be recognised as a nation, after the International Court of Justice ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 did not violate international law.**

The court rejected the objections of Serbia, from which Kosovo split after years of oppression and conflict which only ended after NATO intervened.

Lib Dem European justice & human rights spokeswoman and peer **Sarah Ludford MEP** helped found the all-party support group for Kosovo at Westminster in 1988.

She said: "The blessing of Kosovo's statehood by the International Court of Justice should mean an end to Serbia's complaints and protestations. Serbia has to accept that it lost Kosovo because of the oppressive actions of its then leaders like Slobodan Milosevic

culminating in the atrocities of 1998-99, and cannot have it back."

"All EU states must now recognise Kosovo's independence. There is no longer any valid pretext for the refusal of Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Romania and Slovakia to acknowledge Kosovo as a country in its own right.

"This will then remove the blockage which has prevented the EU treating Kosovo the same as other Western Balkan countries - including Serbia - in terms of preparation towards EU accession and visa-free travel, conditional on security measures."



But a note of caution was sounded by LDEG executive member **Chris Le Breton**. He said: "Whilst I know many Liberals do support Kosovo, I remain one who has consistently said, since the ELDR Council meeting in Zagreb in 2006, that it is all very well to recognise Kosovo as an independent state, but given its long term economic / financial viability as such is in doubt - like Bosnia - it seems somewhat foolhardy of the EU and NATO to support new states in Europe without ensuring that they are independently viable, without large long term injections of outside donor funds! Moreover the recognition of Kosovo was used by Russia as a pretext for its recognition of, and de-facto annexation of Abkhazia and south Ossetia."

● **What do you think? Eurofile will be carrying a Letters column from the next issue. Email to: [phil.bennion@btconnect.com](mailto:phil.bennion@btconnect.com)**

## EU asks legal experts to propose Contract Law reform

**The European Commission, seeking to boost cross-border trade and to ensure strong rights for consumers, has convened a new expert group to propose ways to improve contract law.**

The group met for the first time recently in Brussels with Lib Dem MEP Diana Wallis as the European Parliament's official observer.



Diana said, "This is very exciting and is something I have been speaking about for some time.

"The Commission is working to tackle bottlenecks to the Single Market under

its Europe 2020 strategy, in particular by offering harmonised solutions for consumer contracts, EU model contract clauses and by making progress on the coherence of European contract law."

The Commission will also issue a policy paper and launch a public consultation on the best way forward on contract law in Europe.

The consultation will run until the end of January 2011 and will cover cross-border problems faced by consumers and business and how best to solve them.



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# EU slaps even tougher cap on Mobile roaming fees

**Lib Dem Euro MPs have welcomed even tougher rules to limit charges for using your mobile phone in another EU country, which came into force on July 1st.**

The next phase of the European Union's Data Roaming regulation were applied a fortnight after mobile phone operators lost their bid to outlaw the principle of an EU cap on roaming charges at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

The rules also stop consumers running up huge bills when surfing the web using mobile networks via a mobile phone or a laptop when they are abroad in the EU.

The cap follows one case where a French man was billed €46,000 for watching a film on his phone while in another EU country.

**The new regulations include:**

- a monthly default cut-off for data roaming of €50 to stop 'bill shocks'.
- Consumers can choose a different limit or opt out entirely. A warning is sent when downloads reach 80% of the limit. The operator must cut off the internet connection once the limit is reached.
- mobile roaming call charges are being cut further with a maximum tariff of €0.39 (about 33p) per

minute for calls made and €0.15 per minute for calls received

- The wholesale price for data roaming falls from €1 to €0.80 per MB.
- Receiving a voice mail is free.

**Earlier rules still in force include:**

- Sending a text while roaming in the EU is limited to €0.11, while receiving one is free.
- Operators must use per second billing after the first 30 seconds for calls made and for all calls received.
- Customers must be kept fully informed of operator's charges.

West Midlands MEP **Liz Lynne** said:

"These tougher rules are great news for anyone using a phone while travelling around EU countries for work or on holiday.

"The price cap was clearly much needed as there are some horrendous examples of huge charges slapped on phone and laptop users by operators beyond the reach of national regulators like Ofcom.

***"I have had examples of eye watering bills from people in my own constituency who had no idea they were incurring such massive charges. The cap means this abuse of power will stop."***

South East MEP **Sharon Bowles** also strongly backed the cap. She said: "I fully support the ruling by the European Court of Justice. Operators should not be allowed to charge through the roof for phone calls made or received abroad.

"The EU is not without its critics but a cap on extortionate roaming charges is one of many positive measures implemented by the EU.

"When you think that networks have collected billions of Euros in roaming charges, it is good news that customers in Europe are now able to use their phones without incurring ludicrous costs."



## ET phone...UKIP?

**A member of UKIP's political grouping in the European Parliament, Mario Borghezio MEP, has called on the EU to fund and establish a "European UFO centre", and wants the backing of the European Parliament for the plan.**

The scheme has caused surprise among other MEPs as European nations grapple with a continuing financial crisis and record deficits.

Euro MP Graham Watson said: "Liberal Democrats have always supported greater transparency but what can I say about this? Its out of this world.

"MEPs have just voted on important issues - from cracking down on bankers' bonuses to ensuring the privacy of personal bank details - and to me, the only thing alien in Europe was UKIP's opposition to these measures."

**All year round LibDem ACTION in Europe**

# GREEN VAN MAN? Chris Davies

## reports on his battle for fuel efficiency

**Even when you think you must be onto a sure-fire winner, a combination of commercial vested interests and short-sighted politicians can line up to defeat you. But in the battle for more fuel efficient vans, we're not beaten yet!**

The European Commission has proposed a regulation intended to reduce CO2 emissions from new vans and light commercial vehicles by 33% (to 135gCO2/km by 2020). I strongly support this. I'm confident that affordable technology exists to make it possible.



The protests from the vehicle manufacturers began as soon as the draft was published. They claim that they can't do better than a 20% reduction over the next decade except at disproportionate cost. Cynics might point out that these same manufacturers opposed measures requiring lead free petrol, catalytic converters, compulsory seat belts, rules for recycling end-of-life vehicles, and reductions in CO2 emissions from passenger cars, yet they comfortably met (or are meeting) the standards once introduced.

The next round takes place in the European Parliament. The transport and industry committees have already voted, bowing in the

direction of the vehicle makers, but it is my environment committee that leads on the issue and we don't vote till mid-September. The result looks too close to call.

### **Save CO2, save costs**

The Commission's plans have been taking a kicking. Part of the problem stems from its failure to present the proposals in a way calculated to win political support. The economic depression has forced the issue of global warming off the agenda of most politicians just at present; they are much more likely to want to defend jobs than insist that industry reduces CO2 emissions. But what has been missing from the discussion so far is that reducing CO2 and increasing fuel efficiency are one and the same thing. The Commission's proposals will raise the fuel efficiency of vehicles by 33%. This will make them cheaper to operate and save scarce resources. Any

increase in the purchase price should be offset within a couple of years by reductions in fuel costs.

### **Promote competitiveness**

I have argued that far from the measures being a burden on industry they would prove a real benefit. They would reduce transport costs for business, promote competitiveness, and encourage innovation among vehicle manufacturers without which they will be lucky to survive the coming competitive threat from China. Governments have been happy to sign up to the so-called EU2020 strategy which seeks to promote all of these things, yet the moment a measure is proposed

that will give their words some practical effect they abandon the visionary approach and fall back into defensive mode.

I've been lending a helping hand to the Commission and doing some work to try and win backing for the proposals. I've managed to secure endorsements from the European Small Business Alliance and from the UK's Federation of Small Businesses. In the run up to the votes in the European Parliament I shall use these to try and win support from MEPs and overturn the argument that the 'pro-business' position is to oppose the measures.

***Meanwhile, in the Council of Ministers, the position of the UK government is likely to be crucial. Should it choose to do so, the UK could prevent the Commission proposals from being overturned. But as yet the coalition government hasn't got an official position.***

As Climate Change Secretary, Chris Huhne will have to represent the UK when the EU environment ministers meet, and I am told he is taking the same line as myself. But within government it is the Department for Transport that leads on the issue, and that is Conservative led. Civil servants there might be sympathetic but, as we know, the Conservative position in the European Parliament is less so. I have yet to hear what the view is of Transport Secretary Philip Hammond, but I hope that Business Secretary Vince Cable can be encouraged to throw his weight behind the Commission position.

***Chris Davies is Lib Dem MEP for the North West region.***

# Small & medium-sized firms fail to exploit European market



**Lib Dem Euro MPs Graham Watson and Sharon Bowles have called on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to "look to Europe" for prosperity after a recent report showed a positive link between exports and SME performance.**

They were commenting on a European Commission study in which "internationalised" firms reported employment growth of 7%, while those focused mainly on local markets grew by only

1%. Officials will now look into what the EU can do to help SMEs increase exports.

Graham Watson said; "The European single market offers businesses unrestricted access to almost 450 million customers. With so many small firms struggling, this represents a tremendous opportunity to help weather the storm and even to grow."

However, the report also found that the percentage of UK SMEs exporting was below the EU average of 25%. This is backed up by figures produced by the South West Observatory which show local businesses lag behind in the export markets.

South East MEP Sharon Bowles suggested that many

SMEs are put off exporting because they think it is too complicated.

She said "The EU has removed the barriers to trade within Europe and advice and support is available through organisations like Enterprise Europe Network."



*Sharon Bowles MEP visiting the Norbury Park Farm cheese factory in Surrey*

## EU orders action to beef up UK data watchdog powers

**The European Commission is escalating enforcement action against the UK for ignoring strict data protection obligations.**

Under EU rules, national data protection authorities must have enough power and resources to protect privacy. The Commission says the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is still too weak as it cannot perform random checks or enforce penalties for misuse.

Lib Dem European justice and human rights spokeswoman Sarah Ludford MEP said: "I urge the LibDem/Tory government to act quickly to get rid of

Labour's surveillance state to avoid EU court action and fines. The Information Commissioner's Office is woefully under-funded and under-staffed. I have been pressing Brussels over this breach of EU law for two years."

"We have to protect our privacy from both the Big Brother state and businesses abusing our trust. Millions of people's data on child benefits, tax records and driving tests has gone missing.

EU Commissioner Viviane Reding said: "Having a watchdog with insufficient powers is like keeping your guard dog tied up in the basement."

**All year round LibDem ACTION in Europe**

# Lib Dems back European Parliament call for end of Gaza blockade

**Euro MPs from all main parties have voted overwhelmingly for Israel to lift the blockade on the Gaza strip after the recent Israeli commando attack on an aid convoy.**

The compromise text backed by the European Parliament in Strasbourg also urged the EU High Representative Cathy Ashton and other world leaders to be much more pro-active in pushing Israel to restart a peace process.

The resolution strongly condemned the raid, which killed nine Turkish aid workers on one ship, and called on Israel to lift the blockade which is causing mass unemployment and near starvation to the Gaza strip's 1.3 million civilian population.

North West Lib Dem Euro-MP Chris Davies described as "deceitful"

Israeli claims that it is now lifting a 4-year blockade of Gaza. He has called on Foreign Secretary William Hague to join with his French, Italian and Spanish counterparts who will be visiting Gaza later this month to assess the situation for themselves.

## **Blockade is counterproductive**

The Lib Dem MEP, who was the only British politician to gain access to Gaza during last year's assault by Israel, met privately in the European Parliament with John Ging, the head of operations for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Gaza. Ging described the Israeli

blockade as "profoundly counterproductive" and claimed that it strengthened the position of criminals and extremists. He told the MEP that food and household items were now being allowed through checkpoints but people could not afford to buy them.



Chris Davies said: "They need jobs and Israel continues to forbid the supply of goods for construction and commerce that makes business possible. Trade is in the hands of smugglers who control the tunnels through to Egypt."

Lib Dem MEP Liz Lynne said: "It was good to see MEPs from many parties unite to call for the blockade to be ended, while reasserting Israel's right to stop weapons being imported and condemning rocket attacks on Israel.

"This motion was considerably more extensive than the one Parliament passed in March. It calls for the EU to adopt a much tougher role pressing for real progress in the Israeli / Palestinian conflict.

"The vote shows how shortsighted the hardline Israeli government has been. The suffering in Gaza is so extreme that Israel is losing friends around the world. Turkey used to be one of Israel's strongest allies, but no longer. Their actions have been totally disproportionate."

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**Guy Verhofstadt** MEP, Liberal Leader in The European Parliament and former Prime Minister of Belgium talks on the Future of Europe in a Global Context. Q & A to follow. Supported by The Federal Union.

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

**18.15 - 19.30**

ACC Liverpool, Hall 1B

#### **Will the New CAP Fit?**

**George Lyon** MEP explains what the CAP will look like after 2013. George has drafted the European Parliament's view on the impending reform of the CAP. The NFU have been invited to outline the aspirations of farmers.

**Sunday, 19th September 2010**

**13.00 - 14.00**

ACC Liverpool, Hall 4A

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# Lib Dem EuroFILE



News from LDEG

[www.ldeg.org](http://www.ldeg.org)

Editor: Phil Bennion

Aug 2010

Published by the Liberal Democrat European Group.

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