



## **Brian Simpson**

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Welcome to my January round-up from the European Parliament.

Labour MEPs have spent the first Strasbourg voting session of 2011 week before the break at the European Parliament in Strasbourg voting on a raft of new proposals.

### **Hungarian press freedom**

The European Parliament is not usually a chamber prone to histrionics or rowdiness; we normally let the Italian parliament take that prize. But this week, in Strasbourg, things got a bit heated with the appearance of the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, a somewhat bizarre right-wing populist who now holds the rotating Presidency of the European Council.

Mr Orban has just passed a law in his own country restricting press freedom and giving the state more control on what the media reports. You will be aware that I'm no lover of large sections of the anti-European pro-Tory British media, but I believe a free press is a pre-requisite to a democratic system. Yet in Hungary we have a Prime Minister who feels somewhat different. It was interesting to see how the right wing in our Parliament tried desperately to defend Mr Orban in a rather uneasing type of way, only to see the far right applaud him loudly.

There was no doubt he got a rough ride from the left of the chamber and he was taken somewhat aback by the fierce criticism he received. The problem is that he's not the only one. Other leading right wing nationalist leaders in Eastern Europe believe the same, which is why it is incumbent on us to challenge these people at every opportunity, including our own right wing populists here in the North West.

Labour leader's speech <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8Tu92diXUE>

### **Keeping dangerous chemicals out of the food chain**

On Monday Labour MEPs called for answers from the European Commission on why the rapid alert system failed to pick up the recent problem in Germany, where chickens and pigs had eaten feed contaminated with dangerous levels of dioxin chemicals. We called for the Commission to do more to protect consumers in the EU and stop a repeat of this situation.

### **Safer and cheaper building materials**

On Tuesday my Scottish Labour colleague, Catherine Stihler, pushed a new law through the Parliament to make building materials safer through new higher standards and an EU quality

mark. Prices are expected to drop too, as it will be easier for smaller companies to sell their products throughout the EU.

### **EU to help tackle Alzheimer's**

On Wednesday Labour MEPs backed a call for the EU to put more effort into the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's disease. We put pressure on the European Commission and government ministers to do more to fund and support research into prevention of a condition that cost European governments over £1bn in 2009.

### **Oldham by-election**

Congratulations to Debbie Abrahams, our newest MP, and everybody in the North West region who lent a hand over the Christmas period to keep Oldham East and Saddleworth a Labour seat.

### **A light-hearted final thought...**

My two pet dislikes, food wise, are Brussels sprouts and carrots. I don't know why but that's the way it is. Fantastic good looks have also deserted me in my time but I always thought that may be something to do with genetics and biology etc. Not so. Apparently researchers at St Andrews and Bristol universities have found that strongly coloured vegetables like carrots make people more attractive. So here is my dilemma - do I eat carrots and Brussels sprouts and become exceptionally good-looking but sick, or do I accept that at my time of life you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. The latter, I think!

With best wishes,

Brian Simpson MEP

### **Labour MEP for the North West of England Chair of the European Parliament's Transport Committee**

If you have a Labour Party event that you would like to promote in your area, please let me know and I will try to include it in my next email bulletin.

If I can help you, please get in touch:

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