

Strasbourg Round-Up

Gordon Brown

A week before the G20 summit in London gets underway, Gordon Brown gave his most pro-European speech yet to MEPs at the second Strasbourg plenary session of the month. "Today we enjoy a Europe of peace and unity which will truly rank among the finest of human achievements and which is today a beacon of hope for the whole world," he declared. "Britain today is a country not in Europe's slipstream but firmly in its mainstream". The Prime Minister added that it was crucial, in the current testing conditions, to work together at EU level, so Europe can take the lead in finding solutions to the global economic crisis at the G20 summit.

Speaking after Gordon Brown sat down, Gary Titley said: "It means a lot to hear our Prime Minister endorse the work we do here so enthusiastically. His speech made it clear that standing on the sidelines or trying to go it alone will not do anyone any good. It's a clear message to the eurosceptic Tories: if you say you are serious about tackling the economic crisis or climate change, then you've got to be serious about Europe too."

Spanish property woes

Large numbers of European citizens, including hundreds of Britons, have suffered heartache and potentially huge financial losses as a result of the Spanish land grab scandal. This month in Strasbourg they won support in their battle for justice when MEPs voted through a strongly worded report written by Margrete Auken, which was highly critical of "extensive urbanisation" practices in Spain.

Over the last decade, many people have bought properties in Spain, hoping to start a new life out there. But some have ended up with a disaster on their hands and thousands of pounds out of pocket, after their houses were not completed, or they were told their property was built illegally. The situation got so dire that some of those affected submitted a petition to the European Parliament. The petition called for strong action to be taken to sort out the legal issues, give compensation to those who have suffered and to withhold EU financial assistance, if the Spanish authorities fail to get their act in gear.

Gary was delighted with the outcome of the vote: "It's high time action was taken. I've been campaigning on this for years now on behalf of scores of constituents who have approached me with some truly horrendous tales of woe. That's why, despite some very tough opposition and against all the odds, I'm really pleased that the Auken Report got through. Now the pressure really is on the Spanish authorities to deal with this injustice as a matter of urgency."

Ever closer Union... with the U.S.

The recent arrival of Barack Obama in the White House offers the EU the opportunity to renew and strengthen its links with the U.S. Aware of the changed political climate, MEPs voted in favour of introducing a new political council and a joint transatlantic assembly, which would meet on a regular basis to discuss mutually important issues such as disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, Russia and extraordinary rendition.

The Parliament also called on the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) to step up its activities to ensure that there is a unified transatlantic market by 2015. MEPs said that other priorities for the EU-US partnership should be a lasting peace in the Middle East, the fight against terrorism and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially in Africa.

Welcoming these moves, Gary said: "The new US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's recent visit to the European Parliament was a clear sign that the US wants to engage more actively with the EU. I am delighted we have now set out concrete ways of making this important partnership work better".

Car industry

New car sales have fallen dramatically across the EU in recent months as a result of the recession, putting millions of jobs at risk. To tackle this unprecedented crisis, MEPs called for a united European response to prevent the industry going to the wall. Solutions under discussion included financial support in the form of state guarantees for low interest loans and using European funds to help re-train vulnerable workers. There were also proposals to channel EU money to fund Research and Development programmes into green technologies as a means of using the economic downturn to put the industry on a firmer long term footing.

Gary said: "There are lots of ways the EU can help when things get tough. For instance, the Globalisation Adjustment and EU Social Funds can provide money to retrain and support workers who have lost jobs. Moreover, by working together at EU level, we can make sure that actions taken by some countries don't cause problems in others."

Food safety

We all want to make sure that the food on our plates is safe to eat. With new state-of-the-art technologies like cloning and nanotechnology (see Brussels Briefing No. 37 – May 2008) being developed and brought into use all the time, it is more important than ever that we keep our food safety legislation up to date.

At this Strasbourg plenary, MEPs pressed for more detailed research into the health effects of food derived from clones or using nano materials, before these products are allowed onto supermarket shelves. Gary said: "Not enough research has been done yet and the testing methods are certainly not up to scratch. It's better to be safe than sorry, especially when it comes to people's health."

And Finally...

Tory MEP Daniel Hannan's diatribe against Gordon Brown in Strasbourg has received over a million hits on YouTube. Perhaps, due to this arch eurosceptic's new found fame, readers might be interested in the comments he made about Iceland in the Spectator 5 years ago. He wrote: "Being outside the EU, Iceland has been able to cut taxes and regulation, and to open up its economy... They understand that there is a connection between living in an independent state and living independently from the state. They have no more desire to submit to international than to national regulation. That attitude has made them the happiest, freest and wealthiest people on earth. Long may they remain so." Shame it didn't quite work out that way!

Gary Titley MEP
March 2009 (2)