



Geoffrey Van Orden's

# eDispatch

*From Brussels and Strasbourg*

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Conservatives



Loyal Greetings and Congratulations on the birth of Prince George of Cambridge

## *End of "Purdah"*

*For 3 critical months, from 2 May until 26 July, Conservative Party selection rules for MEP candidates have meant that I have not been allowed to communicate directly with you as Party members until today. The results of the ballot of Party members will be announced on 30 July.*

## THE WEATHER AND THE POLITICAL CLIMATE HAVE CHANGED FOR THE BETTER

We are now in recess until the end of August. I hope you will all have the opportunity for a good summer break, enjoying the company of friends and family and some good books. Perhaps there will also be time for reflection on the political situation, of the improvement in the political climate and the challenges ahead as we move closer to British renegotiation with Europe.

## RESHAPING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE

On 5 June the EU Referendum Bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons with 304 votes in favour. This was an important step in giving the British people an In or Out Referendum on our EU membership by December 2017. Before that date, provided Conservatives are in power, we will renegotiate the terms of Britain's EU membership. Nearly 40 years ago, the then Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson promised to renegotiate Britain's position in Europe. As his former Cabinet Secretary Lord Armstrong has remarked, "Harold didn't get what he set out to get. But he got what he thought would be good enough to say he'd done all right." Neither Conservative parliamentarians nor the British people will accept such an outcome this time. There is an expectation for substantial change in Britain's relationship with the EU. To my mind this must include an end to "ever closer union"; a red card to defend vital national interests; redefinition of "free movement" of people; full control of our borders and immigration policy; legal safeguards to protect the single market; full control of social and economic policy, fisheries, transport and justice; and an end to EU meddling in defence. If we are to remain in a reshaped EU, we need a Europe that costs us less and does less. As the Prime Minister made clear in January, "our participation in the single market and our ability to help set its rules is the principal reason for our membership of the EU". Most of the rest I believe we can do without.

## EU BUDGET CUTS CONFIRMED

At the European Council in June, the EU budget was finalised, taking account of some concerns that had been expressed by elements within the European Parliament. Apart from new flexibilities between different years and between different budget headings, the deal delivers what was agreed between governments in February – for the first time, a €35 billion cut in the EU budget. The Prime Minister successfully fought off a further attempt to unpick the British rebate. We will continue to get the rebate in the years ahead on the same basis that we do now.

## IMMIGRATION POLICY

There is an enormous amount of misinformation and political spin about immigration. As I said in my letter in The Times on 13 May "Most people want strict controls on migrants to our country - after all, no one has provided a convincing explanation why, since 1999, over 250,000 net migrants (mostly non-EU) should have been allowed to settle in the UK every year. This was four times the figure of the previous two decades and a direct result of Labour policy". The Prime Minister has made clear his determination to meet the pledge to slash annual net migration – the number by which the population grows after both immigration and emigration have been counted – to the 'tens of thousands'. On 23 July he reflected that immigration represents a constant drain on Britain's public services. His comments came after the bizarre Office for Budget Responsibility warning that Britain would need millions more immigrants in the coming decades to offset the effects of an ageing population. My view has always been that immigration is about more than number-crunching and economics – it has profound political, social and security implications.

## GOOD NEWS FOR OUR LOCAL FISHING INDUSTRY!

After four years of intense campaigning, there is better news for our fishing industry. There will be a discards ban from 2015, our fishing industry will come under greater regional control, and small-boat fishermen will get a greater share of the fishing quotas, usually dominated by large trawling companies. However, I shall not be content until there is an end to the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

## TRIDENT

As part of the Coalition deal, the LibDem request for a review of Britain's nuclear deterrent posture was agreed. On 16 July the result, the *Trident Alternatives Study*, was published. It makes no recommendations but set outs a range of options.

The report is clear that four boats (as now) would be required to maintain a continuous-at-sea presence and a smaller fleet would risk "multiple unplanned breaks" in 24-hour patrolling and could affect the UK's ability to respond in crises.

It says the UK could still operate a nuclear weapons system with three or even two boats but that would depend on "political confidence" that there was no chance of an unexpected pre-emptive attack and more regular patrols could be reconstituted.

**Defence Secretary Philip Hammond says that it would be "naive or reckless" not to have a like-for-like replacement.**

### THE STUDY RECOGNISES:

- A continuous-at-sea presence is the most "resilient" posture and guarantees the quickest response
- Land and air-based delivery systems effectively ruled out
- An entirely new system, using cruise rather than ballistic missiles, would be more expensive than renewing Trident

## WHY DO WE NEED TO RETAIN THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT? SURELY THE THREAT IS NOW OVER?

"The rationale for maintaining the nuclear deterrent is based on the existence of nuclear arsenals in at least eight other states, the fact that nuclear technologies, know-how and desires are proliferating, the implicit assumption that more states are likely to acquire nuclear weapons in the future, the risks of rogue states acquiring nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and the calculation that nuclear aggression realistically can only be deterred by the possibility of nuclear retaliation". (*Analysis by the Royal United Services Institute*)

We cannot predict the precise threats to our security in the period 2020-2050, when our existing nuclear deterrent system will need to be replaced. In an uncertain world, we would be foolish unilaterally to give up an insurance policy that costs a very small proportion of the annual defence budget, and which also underpins Britain's political clout as a global power. The nuclear deterrent is designed to meet an existential threat, not to deal with terrorists, or indeed a whole range of other immediate threats. That is why we also need strong all-round capabilities and why, in times of peace and economic retrenchment, the temptation to cut defence is dangerous and short-sighted. We should understand history and draw the right conclusions from it.

As a former Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, William Inge once sadly concluded: "It takes in reality only one to make a quarrel. It is useless for the sheep to pass resolutions in favour of vegetarianism whilst the wolf remains of a different opinion."

## WE MIGHT WANT IT BUT, GIVEN THE SIZE OF THE DEFICIT, CAN WE AFFORD IT?



I say we can't afford to be without our nuclear force. But what are the costs? The most expensive element is replacement of the launch platform, currently the 4 Vanguard class submarines. The first of these entered service in 1994 with an expected end of life in 2024. We are again hearing 40-year-old arguments about 'compromise' solutions for their replacement: by reducing the number of submarines, extending the life of the present fleet, or having a cheaper design. Each of these factors depends on a calculation of risk and real cost savings. Most of these options are effectively ruled out in the latest study.

The MOD has calculated the cost of the Trident replacement at £30bn. This figure represents lifetime costs for a system with a 35 year life expectancy – about £1bn a year. To put this in perspective, it is less than 3% of the defence budget. It equates to the additional amount that was surrendered by Labour to the EU each year from the reduction in our rebate. It is equivalent to the current annual rate of benefit fraud. That's the price of staying safe.

**Please do not hesitate to ask for more information on any of the many topics on which I am engaged.**

**I welcome invitations to speak throughout the East of England**

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