



Geoffrey Van Orden's **eDispatch**

From Brussels

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Conservatives



GVO meets Commissioner designate, Lord Hill

"I didn't become an MEP in order to promote the EU - I want us to govern our own country. I go to Brussels to speak up for British interests and for the people of the East of England. My priorities are the prosperity and security of the United Kingdom." **Geoffrey Van Orden MBE MEP**

THE NEW PARLIAMENT

Since we took our seats in the new Parliament on 1 July we have been finalising the make-up of our political groups, deciding on committee and delegation places, and 'electing' the President of the Commission and the President of the Parliament while focused on the deepening crisis in Ukraine and the fresh cycle of violence in the Middle East. The reshuffle of Conservative Government Ministers has provided a crucial backdrop. Have no doubt, our main focus must be on winning the General Election in ten months time. Otherwise, we can say goodbye to an EU referendum and the essential reforms in our EU relationship that must precede it. We would also be saying goodbye to economic recovery, to control of immigration, to a radical shift away from the benefits culture and to vital improvements in our schools.

THE JUNCKER SAGA

Once Jean-Claude Juncker had been nominated by the European Council (in fact, 26 of the 28 Prime Ministers), it was a foregone conclusion that he would receive the necessary endorsement by the Parliament, given that the Socialist Group and centrist EPP Group, both led by Germans from the ruling coalition parties in Berlin, had done a deal. Come the day (15 July 2014) he received 422 votes - of note was the fact that 307 MEPs present did not vote for him, including, of course, our own ECR Group.

The week before, Juncker endured two hours of hostile questioning when he presented himself to our ECR Group. He insisted he didn't believe in a "United States of Europe", that there "shouldn't be stupid competition between the EU and NATO" and that he had "never opposed the idea of repatriation of powers" from Brussels back to member states. "I don't believe in the Brussels machine taking over everything", he said. So that's alright then. Our new closet ally?!

WHO WILL BE THE NEXT HIGH REPRESENTATIVE?

A 'special' European Council was convened on 16 July to nominate the EU's next Foreign Policy Chief (the so-called 'High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy') and to choose the next President of the European Council. However, Brussels will be forced to stumble through this potentially difficult summer without filling these top jobs as the 28 Prime Ministers, meeting in European Council, have so far failed to reach agreement. Various stars have risen and fallen during the discussions as they try to find someone with credibility while meeting competing claims of political stance, gender, region, and now, attitude to Russia. Personally, I would scrap the High Representative position altogether. It is a creature of the disastrous Lisbon Treaty, which Conservatives strongly opposed.

As we reject the idea of a state called Europe, it is right that we should discourage the construction of its diplomatic and military arms. The High Representative will succeed the fortunately lack-lustre Baroness Ashton and reign over 139 EU 'embassies' with nearly 7,000 staff costing some £500 million. In addition, there is control of an EU military staff scanning the globe for opportunities to run up the EU flag on military operations.

In late 2010, William Hague warned British diplomatic missions against "competence creep" by the EU's External Action Service. And Conservative Ministers began to twig that there was some significance to the EU's defence pretensions when they applied the brakes at last December's European Council, which had been heralded as the great leap forward in EU military endeavours. They realised that we could not, in one breath, seek to distance

ourselves from 'ever closer union' and call for repatriation of powers from Brussels, and in another acquiesce in a flagship EU policy designed to deepen political integration and extend the range of EU competence.

There is likely to be another European Council convened in August to come to a decision - Britain should seek a non-entity and then aim to wind back the pretensions of the External Action Service in our negotiations on reform.

THE ECR GROUP

The European Conservatives & Reformists (ECR) have been confirmed as the third largest political Group of the Parliament with 70 members from 15 countries. We now have not just our British Conservatives (20 members) and Polish Law & Justice (19) but Germany's AfD (7), the Belgian N-VA (4) and the Danish DPP (4) along with Dutch, Greek, Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Irish, Finnish, Slovakian, Lithuanian, and Latvian MEPs. The size of our Group gives us certain precedence in debates and in the choice of committees and delegations. As a consequence, we have taken the chairmanship of the Internal Market Committee (Vicky Ford) and of the Delegation for Relations with India (GVO) - two vital bodies in terms of Britain's economic growth. By the way, the UKIP-led EFDD group is the smallest of the Parliament's seven Groups - not the 4th largest as Mr Farage has claimed - and scraped through with the bare minimum of 7 countries thanks to a last minute defection from Mme Le Pen's National Front. Mr Farage now presides over a very motley group with very fractious tendencies - it will be interesting to see how long it lasts.

LORD HILL NOMINATED AS BRITISH COMMISSIONER

We were all surprised at Lord Hill's nomination as the British Commissioner but he has a sparkling CV and I have now spent time with him and fully understand why he is the Prime Minister's choice. He'll be good, provided he gets one of the top economic jobs vital to Britain, and - crucially, manages to win over the Parliament in its Commissioner-designate hearings in October.

GAZA

It is heartbreaking to see the images of so many civilian casualties, particularly children, as a consequence of the latest outbreak of conflict in Gaza. Under these circumstances the Israelis come in for enormous criticism. The media have been full of comment these past few days but I would only draw attention to a few fundamentals - if you believe that Israel has the right to exist, as I do, and that the Palestinians deserve nationhood.

The government of Israel is committed to a two-state solution - that means an essentially Jewish state of Israel and a viable, democratic Palestinian state that is not a base for terrorism. To achieve this, the Israelis are prepared to withdraw from 'occupied' territories (as they did from Gaza in 2005) provided there are some minor adjustments to the border to take account of new realities and security needs.

The problem is that the Palestine Authority is divided and Mahmoud Abbas does not control Gaza which is in the hands of Hamas. And Hamas, a terrorist organisation, a sub-set of the Moslem Brotherhood yet armed and supported by Iran, does not recognise the right of Israel to exist. It continues its attacks on Israel, deliberately targeting civilians, and deliberately exposing its own people to danger - knowing that every picture of a dead child serves its own cruel purpose, outraging international opinion and bolstering support for its own extremist agenda.

I know from first-hand experience that the Palestinian people want to live in peace and freedom, they want escape from poverty and a better future for their children. They have been appallingly led, misled, over decades by leaders whose obsession has been Israel rather than the well-being of their own people.

The EU is the main financier of the Palestine Authority. Just as we expect the US to exert influence on Israel, so I expect the EU to use its leverage on the Palestine Authority to bring it to the conference table to agree a solution that will enable, peace, security, stability, freedom and economic prosperity to prevail. That will mean some serious compromises on both sides.

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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