

ROBERT STURDY MEP

VIEW FROM STRASBOURG

January 2013



First of all let me wish you a Happy New Year! It seems that the New Year has brought with it the beginning of winter. I know across the UK and in Brussels and Strasbourg there have been some chilly temperatures.

This week in Strasbourg was a quiet one, with only a few key pieces of legislation being passed. One of the pieces of legislation that got a lot of buzz was the new Parliamentary calendar for 2013. As you probably know, the European Court of Justice recently ruled that the Conservative led attempt to join 2 Strasbourg sessions into one week, reducing the number of times the travelling circus meets from 12 times a year to 11, was illegal and in violation of the EU treaty, forcing the Parliament to vote on a revised calendar that reinstated the 12th mission to the Alsace region. We all know the incredible waste this out of date and out of touch mission costs, but now just think of all the additional waste caused to reprint and republish the 2013 calendar!

In the field of trade there were a few small files that were on the agenda during this month's plenary session. The first one was the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement with Eastern and Southern African States. Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are meant to establish free trading areas between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries. I am a firm believer that trade is the best form of aid to less developed countries. These agreements have been in negotiation for more than 10 years and the Parliament's approval of this particular Agreement is a step in the right direction to ensuring fairer trade for all.

Another trade issue that was voted on this week was a resolution on the mandatory marking of origin for certain products or what is sometimes informally called a 'Made-in' regulation. This is a difficult issue for countries in the EU to agree on. Currently the EU does not have a requirement for producers to label where certain industrial products are made. Previous attempts to set legislation for made in have been found to be incompatible with the rules of the World Trade Organisation. We all agree that more needs to be done to ensure consumer protection and fight counterfeiting but in an increasingly global market with fragmented labeling regimes; this is not an easy task. Increasingly, products are made using materials from different places it can be hard to determine a single origin and this can be misleading for the consumer. We must also consider the huge financial and administrative burden this would place on businesses, who are already struggling

under the strain of red tape. However, I do fully support strict labeling on food and drinks. The recent "horsegate" debacle in which UK supermarkets were found to be selling beef products containing horse meat was shocking and totally unacceptable.

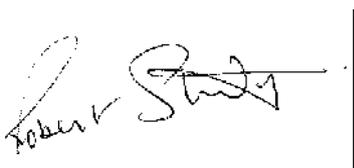
One of the big items coming up on the legislative calendar is the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP is a very important piece of legislation for the EU, as it will regulate agricultural policy until 2020 and the CAP represents just under half the EU budget!

The Parliament is finally ready, after over a year of discussions, to vote on amendments to the European Commission's proposal for the CAP. Nearly 8,000 amendments were submitted in July 2012 by the European Parliament! Luckily, we have managed to reduce these to around 120 compromise amendments which cover all the significant issues.

The Agriculture Committee vote will take place on 23 and 24 January. The amendments which are approved will then be voted in the Parliament Plenary in March. If there has been no agreement on the EU budget before this date then the final approval will have to wait until later. Because of all these delays, the new legislation will not be completed in time to be in place by the end of the year. Since the existing CAP is due to expire at the end of 2013, the Commission is expected to come forward with legislation this year which will extend the existing CAP for one year, until the entry into force of the new regulations probably at the beginning of 2015. As you can see it is a complex piece of machinery, but we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Last Thursday the Parliament heard from representatives from the Irish Presidency who for the next six months set the agenda in the Council of the European Union. During this presentation the Irish Presidency set out its priorities for the next six months. As I have previously mentioned one of the most exciting priorities of the Presidency is launching an EU-US free trade agreement. Other important priorities include reducing youth unemployment, enhancing the Single Market, revising the Common Fisheries Policy and of course completing the EU budget for 2014-2020.

So far the spirit around here in 2013 is that things are getting better. Both European Commission President Manuel Barroso and Council President Herman Van Rompuy have said that the financial crisis is over in Europe and that Eurozone has overcome major problems with its currency and things will only get better. This crisis has been dragging on so long now that I'm not sure that a quick fix has solved everything, but again I hope 2013 turns out to be better than 2012.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sturdy", is written over a vertical line that extends downwards from the end of the signature.

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