

# Richard Corbett MEP

Labour Member of the European Parliament  
for Yorkshire & Humber

Quarterly Report

Autumn 2016

## 1. Reflections since the Referendum

From the Brexit referendum to Trump, from austerity to terrorism to the plight of refugees, not to mention the state of the Labour party, 2016 has been an awful year! And the implications for our future are almost unimaginable.

To focus here just on the European dimension; Theresa May's terrible handling of the first few months of the most important political process in a generation has not augured well. We approach the Christmas break with very little clarity from the government, awaiting the decision of the Supreme Court, a nation divided, the economy under pressure and our European partners in the negotiations running out of goodwill.

As I repeat ad nauseam, if there is any kind of mandate from an advisory referendum, won by a narrow majority on the basis of a pack of lies and with a questionable franchise, it can surely only be to secure a Brexit that works for Britain without sinking the economy. If it becomes apparent that we are heading for a costly, disastrous Brexit, it will be challenged.

I have worked with Keir Starmer and his team - he spoke at our regional policy forum in Sheffield in November - and congratulate them on forcing the government to promise to



provide Parliament with a plan before it starts the Brexit procedure. This plan must list the choices Britain must make as to what it wants to secure - and cost the options available.

Some people voted for Brexit at any cost, but many voted for Brexit at no cost - because that's what they were told (they were even told that there would be a benefit, going to the NHS!). As the autumn statement already revealed a huge Brexit-caused black hole in public finances, and as the devaluation of the pound triggers rises in the prices of food and fuel, and as the rate of investment and growth forecasts tumble - even ahead of actual Brexit - those people will be entitled to ask for an opportunity to re-consider.

Meanwhile, I continue with my work in the constituency and in parliament. I have been unanimously re-elected as Deputy Leader of the Labour MEPs. I sit on the crucial constitutional committee, where I will be engaged in the Brexit discussions. I participate in the fisheries committee (unlike a certain Mr. Farage) to secure good deals and sustainable stocks for an important British industry.

I have just completed a two year review of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, aimed inter alia at bringing greater clarity and transparency to the rights and

duties of MEPs, including much stronger sanctions for those who misbehave, which has been accepted by the European Parliament.

And of course, as well as taking up casework on behalf of various constituents, I have continued to travel across Yorkshire, speaking at meetings, delivering lectures and visiting a broad range of businesses, trade unions, universities and other communities. This continues to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of my job.



## 2. Drax power station's sustainable fuel from the States

In large parts of Yorkshire, chances are that the electricity you use was generated using wood from Virginia, Georgia and other southern states of the USA. This is because Drax power station, the largest in the country, has switched from coal to wood for two (soon three) of its six furnaces. This is both for economic and environmental reasons - it should reduce net carbon emissions.

To have a positive economic and environmental impact - wood grows again, absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>, whereas coal doesn't - sustainable management of the forests that the wood comes from, as well as good practice in how

the wood is harvested and processed into pellets for the furnace, is key.

Earlier this year I met Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) critical of the process, visited Drax, saw the new port facilities in Hull where the wood pellets are unloaded, and read a number research papers, both critical and supportive.

In November I went, as part of an EU delegation, to Virginia to see all stages of the production process: forest owners, lumber companies, a sawmill, a pellet mill that supplies Drax, and a tree nursery. I met federal and state forestry authorities,

certification bodies, sustainability officers and researchers.

Forest owners and loggers actually get a better return using solid wood for other purposes than they get for wood pellets, for which they get a lower price. This means that pellets are sourced primarily from wood that would otherwise be unused and left to rot or be burned (“residues” such as branches and tops, or sawdust) or used for low value and short life wood products. If and when whole trees are used, it is usually where they are unsuitable for making furniture, planks or building material, because they are diseased, bent or too small. All this would end up emitting CO<sub>2</sub> anyway, so there is little or no net increase in emissions from burning this type of wood in a power plant like Drax.

There were other examples of good practice. Visiting the pellet company Enviva, (which has more trees within 75 miles of it than there are trees in the whole UK), I found they refuse to take wood from lumber companies if it comes from a forest that is not

being re-planted - even if it has been cut down already and the residue wood is there. It also won't take wood from environmentally sensitive areas. It claims 100% traceability of its sourcing and says that they are, paradoxically, more rigorous in their fibre sourcing than purchasers of higher value wood.

As the use of wood for buildings is likely to rise with new technologies like cross lamination - which from an environmental point of view sequesters carbon for many years while already using far less energy than concrete or steel during construction - there will be greater demand for wood, but correspondingly more leftover residuals. It makes sense to use the this. Biomass energy generation replacing fossil fuels seems a good solution.

In the meantime, we can rest assured that the Drax biomass fuel comes from sustainable forests and is contributing to a net reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.



### 3. Fisheries Committee Updates

As a member of the Fisheries Committee, I held an event together with European Anglers Alliance, Alienor EU, and the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association on recreational fishing and the long term management of sea bass. The focus was on the balance of effort between angling and commercial fishing as regards limitations on fishing bass, which has become endangered. I followed this up with the European Commission which will publish a proposal for bass management measures in 2017 which, if adopted, will mean that only recreational fisheries and commercial hook and line will be allowed to target Northern Sea Bass.

Other current issues include developing a policy for the Arctic as fishing there becomes more likely due to warmer temperatures; a North Sea Plan which will focus on simplifying current legislation; and the approval of a long-term plan for cod stocks and the fisheries exploiting those stocks which affects some UK zones.

Of course, there is understandable concern over Brexit and the future

of UK-EU fishing relations. At the moment nothing is known about how this will develop - the government haven't even decided what their negotiating objectives are. However it is going to be extremely complicated, not least because:

- we share stocks of fish which migrate across maritime borders
- many EU countries have access to our waters (as we do to theirs) through historical rights pre-dating the EU, recognised under international law, making any dis-entanglement of rights even more complicated
- the government will need to fight for a very good trade deal as we export most fish caught by British fishers, and four out of five of our top export countries for fish are within the EU.

This is crucially important to the fishing and processing industries of Yorkshire & Humber, which employ thousands of people, as well as the continued survival of our coastal communities.

#### Doorstep EU App

My team run an app which provides up-to-the-minute analysis of media headlines on Europe and briefings on unfolding issues. Scan the QR code to the right or go to: [richardcorbett.org.uk/app](http://richardcorbett.org.uk/app)



## 4. Making the EU more efficient and transparent

One of my recent responsibilities has been to draft a complete overhaul of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure. Parliament approved what is now known as the 'Corbett Report' on 13 December. The changes will make the institution more efficient, transparent and accountable. The vote concludes almost two years of hard cross-party work to improve the functioning of the European Parliament.

New measures include the banning of paid lobbying second jobs for MEPs during their term of office and, after they step down, their privileges as ex-MEPs - such as having free access to the Parliament - will be denied if they become lobbyists. There will be

stronger penalties for MEPs making racist or xenophobic statements in Parliament and for those who set out to disrupt parliamentary activity. In cases of severe misconduct, an MEP can be fined and banned from representing the Parliament externally for up to a year.

Contrary to what the Daily Express claimed in a screaming UKIP-inspired headline about my report, EU legislative procedures are made more transparent, especially where it comes to negotiations between the Parliament and the Council (of national ministers) to find compromises (given that EU legislation has to be approved both by the Council and by Parliament).

## 5. Correspondence from Constituents

Aside from varied and numerous individual cases, the main issues that constituents have contacted me about in the past few months have been on EU trade deals and Brexit.

On trade, constituents have expressed their concerns about the terms of CETA and TTIP, particularly in relation to the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) aspect of the proposed agreements and its potential impact on the provision of public services in the UK.

On Brexit, constituents have expressed a myriad of concerns

regarding the impact that leaving the EU may have on their individual rights, on the business or industry they work in, and on UK and European politics more generally.

From calls for the retention of EU citizenship rights for UK citizens, to fears about the UK losing access to valuable EU programmes and the protection of EU legislation on workers' rights and environmental standards, many people in the Yorkshire and Humber region are clearly concerned about the impact Brexit will have on their lives.

## 6. Other news

I briefly held the position of national chair of the cross-party European Movement, because the previous chair stood down after the referendum. However, I felt that I could not devote enough time to do this on a long term basis and a new chair has now been found. The European Movement is campaigning to stop a disastrous Brexit. Anyone interested in joining them - they have an active Yorkshire section - can do so here:

[www.euromove.uk](http://www.euromove.uk)

And finally....

In December, I was honoured to be listed by IDA as the "most influential British MEP" when it comes to the Brexit negotiations, by Mark Watts of International Dialogue Advisors. (IDA GROUP)

Thanks for reading this report. Email me if you need to get in touch:

[richard@richardcorbett.org.uk](mailto:richard@richardcorbett.org.uk)

### Conferences attended

Labour Party Conference, Liverpool

National Policy Forum, Loughborough

Regional Policy Forum, Sheffield

Regional Board, Wakefield

### Public debates

Halifax, Brexit: What now?

Halifax, National Youth Parliament

Hull University, Brexit Negotiations

Leeds, Trade Justice

Leeds, Path Yorkshire

Leeds, Aspire International

Leeds University, EU Democracy

York, Trade Justice

London, European Movement

London, Labour Movement for Europe

### Broadcast media appearances

The Today Programme

Daily Politics

LBC radio

French & German TV/Radio

### Articles published

The Stagers Blog (New Statesman)

Labour List

Left Foot Forward

The Fabian Review

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My website is updated regularly with news, views and analysis on EU and Labour party topics.

If you subscribe to my newsletter via this website, you'll be sent an email whenever I add new content, so you don't miss any updates.

You can also download a copy of this report, and all previous quarterly reports, from the website if you wish .

Why not follow me on Twitter:

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Or 'like' my page on Facebook:

**Richard Corbett MEP**

Finally, as a group of Labour MEPs, we have a shared website where you can read press releases, download resources and find out about all the Labour representatives in the European Parliament.

**[www.eurolabour.org.uk](http://www.eurolabour.org.uk)**

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