

Richard Corbett MEP

Labour Member of the European Parliament
for Yorkshire & Humber

Quarterly Report

Autumn 2019

Welcome to my Autumn Quarterly Report



Since being re-elected earlier this year, I have opened a new office in Bradford. I continue to work for my constituents, with visits and speaking engagements in Yorkshire & Humber and the European Parliament. I have additional responsibilities within the Labour Party, where, as Leader of our MEPs, I sit in Shadow Cabinet and on the NEC. I also continue to appear regularly on local and national media, as well as writing blogs, briefings, articles and tweeting regularly.

1. Brexit Update

Brexit has of course been the crucial issue for our continent, our country and our party in the past few months. Boris Johnson tried all sorts of tactics to avoid scrutiny by MPs as he floundered to fulfil the wild promises he made to get elected by Tory party members after Theresa May's ignominious departure from office. It is worth reflecting on Johnson's chaotic Brexit behaviour: in fewer than one hundred days in Downing Street, he unlawfully prorogued parliament, called a second prorogation for a Queen's speech to waste more parliamentary time, spent £100 million on a woeful

advertising campaign for a Brexit date that didn't happen, dressed up a rehashed last minute version of May's deal as a breakthrough, refused to allow anything like sufficient time to debate such an important piece of legislation, and suffered defeat after defeat as MPs refused to bow to his increasingly erratic tactics.

Thanks to Hilary Benn's 'safeguarding bill' a cliff-edge No Deal Brexit on 31 October was avoided - despite Johnson's petulant protestations over sending the legally required letter to the European Council - and an

extension to EU membership was granted and agreed until 31 January 2020. So having failed to deliver anything he promised, Johnson has now gone for an election which will be crucial for the country's future in countless ways.

On Brexit, we are now in a situation where every single opposition party in Parliament (Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid Cymru, Greens, Alliance, ChangeUK) want a new Brexit referendum on any Brexit outcome (any deal or no-deal against the option to Remain). This is justified, as Brexit has turned out to bear no resemblance to what Johnson and the Leave campaigners promised during the referendum campaign three and a half years ago, when they claimed Brexit would be "the easiest deal in history", would save lots of money (that would all go to the NHS) and that it

would be good for jobs and the economy.

If Labour forms a government after the election, it will negotiate to get the least damaging deal possible to put to voters as the alternative to Remain. You can't have a referendum with only one option, so making the Leave option somewhat less damaging than what Johnson is offering, makes sense. Labour would then formally decide at a special party conference how it would campaign in such a scenario. The presumption is that it would campaign to Remain, as this is the overwhelming view in the party. However, any formal decision will be left until after any new negotiations have concluded, and with Jeremy Corbyn as PM remaining above the fray, as he will need to implement the result whatever the outcome of the referendum.

A guide to talking about Brexit

Three and a half years since the referendum, there are still many myths and misconceptions about the choices and their consequences that leaving the EU will entail. I have prepared a straightforward summary of the most important aspects, which I presented at a recent UNISON Conference. I hope it will help other people to understand and talk about the EU and Brexit accurately.

You can read it on my website, [here](#).

2. Annual Labour Party Conference Report

The Labour Party's Annual Conference in Brighton saw some lively debates, not least on Brexit, as well as the usual wide array of fringe meetings, seminars, social events and demonstrations. I spoke at many fringe events, including the very well attended Northern Regions' Reception, participated in three NEC meetings and addressed the

Trade Unions Liaison Organisation (TULO) meeting where the concerns about Brexit-triggered job losses were at the top of the agenda.

Conference this year was cut short by the dramatic, unanimous and entirely correct decision by the nine Supreme Court judges that Johnson's prorogation of parliament was unlawful.

3. Situation in Kashmir

Over the summer I was part of a delegation of politicians and officials visiting Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. You can read a summary of my visit [here](#). The day after we left, India escalated tensions in the region by revoking the autonomous status of the part of Kashmir that it controls, splitting off Ladakh from Kashmir, moving in thousands of extra troops, cutting communications networks and arresting local politicians.

There are strong links between communities in Kashmir and in Yorkshire, and I have spoken in Parliament about the need for the EU and its member countries to put pressure on India to cease this behaviour and move towards fulfilling its

obligations under United Nations resolutions that it has so far ignored. In September I was also honoured to host the President of Azad Kashmir at a [conference in Brussels](#), which was attended by other MEPs, international journalists and many members of the Kashmiri community from Europe and beyond. <https://www.richardcorbett.org.uk/european-parliament-debate-on-kashmir/>

Sadly, the situation remains difficult, more than three months later, and I am continuing dialogue with representatives from the Kashmiri Community in Yorkshire and nationally to offer solidarity and support.

4. 'Let us be Heard' March and Rally



October 19 saw one of the biggest marches in British history as more than a million people travelled from across the country to demonstrate in London. I [spoke to a large crowd](#) assembling as the Left Block in Park Lane ahead of the march. On the march itself I chatted with dozens of people with a wide range of political views (and often with many witty placards) all of who were determined to do everything they could to stop Johnson's

hard Brexit, or worse, crashing out without a deal. In a packed Parliament Square, I stood alongside thousands as the news that Johnson's undemocratic attempt to force his rehashed deal through without proper parliamentary scrutiny was defeated by MPs. We also heard some great speeches, kicked off by Yorkshire's Sir Patrick Stewart, and followed by several of the most senior members of Labour's Shadow Cabinet.



5. Appointing the new European Commission

Since the European Parliament elections in May, it's all change in the EU institutions. In July, the Parliament elected the prospective next President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (in stark contrast to the UK, where, around the same time, a new Prime Minister was appointed by the Queen without any confirmatory vote in the House of Commons).

Von der Leyen only got the necessary majority after making a number of commitments to the Socialist Group of MEPs, to which Labour MEPs belong.

The focus then moved onto the remaining members of the team of Commissioners. Every nominee had to be vetted by the European Parliament which holds a three-hour public hearing and cross-examination of each candidate in the parliamentary committee corresponding to his or her prospective portfolio. (Again, an interesting contrast with Britain: imagine if new ministers had to be quizzed in public for three hours before taking office - it would be revealing, and many [think: Grayling] would no doubt fall by the wayside!)

Three nominees were weeded out as a result of this process, including the initial nominees from Hungary, Romania and France. But there were two nominees who were particularly impressive in their hearings in the Parliament.

The first was Frans Timmermans from the Dutch Labour Party. Timmermans was the candidate of the Party of European Socialists for the President of the European Commission, and has previously served as Dutch foreign minister and First Vice President of the European Commission. He will take the portfolio of climate change and the European Green New Deal.

The second was Nicolas Schmit of Luxembourg, whose employment and social rights portfolio includes workers' rights, which he is determined to strengthen, in particular in the gig economy. His hearing reflected the priorities of both the UK Labour Party and the Party of European Socialists more widely.

There is no British Commissioner as Boris Johnson refused to nominate one, despite promising to do so, thereby leaving Britain unrepresented (presumably

because he can't find a Conservative capable of surviving a three-hour public grilling!).

After the hearings, the new Commission as a whole requires a vote of confidence from the

Parliament to take office. This took place during the last week of November with the new Commission approved by 461 votes to 157 (and 89 abstaining) taking office on 1 December, one month behind schedule.

6. MAP Charity Visit - Leeds



Deserving a special mention is my visit to the Music and Arts Production Charity (MAP) – an innovative charity in central Leeds. They are a pioneering alternative provider in creative education, offering qualifications and first-hand experience to young people at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. The charity provides a space for them to explore and develop practical

talents, functional skills and artistic expression.

The stunning Grade II listed Hope Foundry (above), where MAP is based, dates back to 1831 was once a home for a range of multi-disciplinary craftspeople. MAP's vision is to return Hope Foundry to a space of making and creating – a piece of history brought back to life to benefit all ages in the local community.

7. Photo Gallery



With Lord Hestletine after a lively debate on Brexit (top left), with students from the White Rose universities intership scheme (top right) and with fellow panelists at a Leeds for Europe conference (below).



With Jeremy Corbyn and Labour activists (top), on Sky News with Adam Boulton and Beth Rigby, and marching with Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Keir Starmer and Emily Thornberry in Brighton.



8. Constituents' Issues

The top ten issues, in terms of correspondence, telephone calls and visitors to my constituency office, have been:

1. Labour's position on Brexit - by far the most popular issue
2. Brexit Party behaviour
3. Amazon fires
4. Mercosur deal
5. Disenfranchisement of EU citizens in the UK
6. Nazanin Ratcliffe
7. Kashmir
8. The environment
9. Prorogation of Parliament
10. People's vote.



9. Social Media

Readers may be aware that I have an informative website – richardcorbett.org.uk – where I post several blogs and articles a month. You can follow me on Twitter [@RCorbettMEP](https://twitter.com/RCorbettMEP) (I now have almost 70,000 followers) and on Facebook: facebook.com/rcorbett/

I was also the first UK politician to develop an app, Doorstep EU, which can be downloaded to iPhones and Android devices.

For three years I have used the app to provide factual information and regular rebuttal of incorrect news items on Europe and Brexit.

Doorstep EU App

For 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



10. Visits, Events & Meetings (* = as speaker)

Yorkshire & Humber:

Bradford Momentum*
Visit with Ian Lavery to Owlett Social Club*
Yorkshire Remain Day*, York
St. Peter's School *, York
White Rose Universities' internship, York
Debate on Kashmir, Bradford Council chamber
Kashmir protest, Bradford
Great Northern Stop Brexit Conference*, Leeds
Stop the Coup demonstration*, Leeds
International Day of the Girl event, Bradford
Leeds for Europe*
Hull University debate*
Leeds Beckett University*
MAP (Music and Arts Production) Charity, Leeds

Yorkshire CLPs:

Cleethorpes*
Shipley*
Windhill and Wrose (branch)*

Events elsewhere in UK:

Labour Party Annual Conference, Brighton
Shadow Cabinet
Labour Party NEC
Parliamentary Labour Party
Keir Starmer shadow ministerial team meeting
'Let the People Decide' march
Labour Party National Policy Forum, International Commission
Labour Party Clause V committee
'Love Socialism Hate Brexit' backbench MPs group
'Beyond Article 50' backbench MPs group
'Let us be Heard' march

European Parliament (other than parliamentary meetings):

Not Leaving Quietly Concert
Brum4EU
Remainer Now event
Anti-Brexit protest outside the European Council meeting of 17/18 Oct
Hope not Hate
British Retail Consortium
Make UK
Conference on Kashmir*

President of the EESC
Asylum reform NGOs
Series of meetings with Keir Starmer and EU officials and MEPs
Fisheries NGOs
Michel Barnier

Visiting UK delegations from:

Gibraltar government, British Chamber of Commerce, Visiting Labour MPs, GMB Union

UK Media appearances include:

Sky News, several appearances
BBC Look North
LBC Radio, several debates
BBC Radio York
'Three Men in a Pub' podcast

International Media appearances include:

IFrankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
TOK FM Radio (Polish radio)
Estonian Public Radio
VRT radio (Flemish radio)
LN24 (Belgian TV)
ABC Asia Pacific News (Australian TV)
Public Senat
Euronews
Associated Press
Deutschland Radio
Pakistan and Kashmir TV

Print media includes:

European Parliament Magazine
Labour List

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My website is updated regularly with my blog, briefings, news, views and analysis on EU and Labour Party issues:

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