

# **Richard Corbett MEP**

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Quarterly Report

Summer 2015

A lot has happened in both British and European politics since the spring. Cameron hit the ground running with his long-threatened EU ‘renegotiations’. Already rattled by a shocking general election result, we in Labour now face the immediate double challenge of putting up a credible opposition to an increasingly right-wing Tory government and gearing up for a referendum campaign in which the Tories will be little or no help — and doing both of these while choosing a new leader! Meanwhile, of course, the daily work in the European Parliament goes on, and I hope what follows gives you a flavour of some of this work.



Richard

## 1. Reform and referendum

There was no honeymoon for the returning Prime Minister. It’s already become clear that trying to govern with such a slim majority — the smallest of any incoming Conservative PM since the 1840s — has left him in hock to even the smallest of rebellions on his backbenches, not least on Europe.

Now his idea for an in-out EU referendum will go ahead. This is a referendum he originally promised, remember, to postpone the day of reckoning in his party’s brewing civil war on Europe until after the election. Well, the election was won (just), and the war has now begun to spill out into the public domain.

But we haven’t seen the half of it yet. Cameron has kept his so-called “reform demands” vague, not only to the British people but to other European countries too. His problem is that, as soon as he spells out his intentions clearly, his party will divide.

At one end will be the right wing, who passionately hate Europe. They want to walk out under any circumstances, and have already been trying to bounce Cameron into making impossible demands so they can claim the EU is ‘unreformable’. At the other end will be those — especially those close to business — who recognise that he’s taking

inordinate risks. Between these two positions we’re already seeing a mish-mash of individual posturing Tory MPs, torn between wanting to make a mark to please their grassroots and not wanting to rock the government’s fragile boat.

Meanwhile, with or without Britain’s current demands, the EU is anyway a non-stop reform process. It is a constant renegotiation of existing policies and procedures. Most EU legislation nowadays is about revising, updating, adapting or repealing existing EU legislation.

So Cameron could and should claim as a victory various recent or ongoing reforms which Britain has supported. These include the much-needed reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, a reform which even Greenpeace hailed as very good; the 2014 budget settlement, which shifts money away from agriculture towards areas such as research where spending at EU level saves money at national level through economies of scale or avoiding duplication; the ongoing REFIT programme, which is revisiting all EU laws to simplify, adjust or repeal them; and the negotiations that have just started on ‘better regulation’, providing for systematic use of impact assessments and stakeholder consultations for new proposals as well as stronger provisions to see whether previous laws have worked.

But there’s the ever-present danger that the Tory right wing and its media echo chamber will seize on this whole process to reopen long-settled debates. They want to abandon Europe’s social dimension, dismantle hard-won workers’ rights and disregard the EU’s existing high standards of consumer and environmental protections.

The EU has created the world’s largest market, but, crucially, it is a market with rules to protect consumers, workers and the environment. These rules need strengthening – that is our daily work in the European Parliament – but even the level of protection we have achieved is resented by the free market fundamentalists on the right of the Tory party and their allies in the print media.

We must fight to ensure that Cameron doesn’t water these down, but if he does, we must also understand one crucial thing. There are no circumstances in this regard in which we are better off out. We must not paint ourselves into a corner by silly threats to campaign for a ‘no’ vote if such-and-such a condition is not met.

We must make it clear to Cameron and his UKIP-lite backbenchers that we will not tolerate the fracturing of a European Union that works to the benefit of our country and our continent.

## 2. Labour Movement for Europe

In the coming months, it will be vital that the Labour Party has a strong, progressive, pro-European voice. We need not only to speak clearly to the nation in advance of the referendum, but also to engender a lively, intelligent and well-informed conversation within the party.

I am on the executive of the Labour Movement for Europe, which is leading the charge. We relaunched in Westminster in June: standing room only in a room packed with Labour MPs, peers, trade unionists, journalists, activists from our own party and members of sister parties from around Europe. Our next priority was to make our

voice heard in Labour's leadership contest: we publicly invited each leader and deputy leader candidate to answer a small number of key questions about the European Union and Britain's place in it, and we have publishing their detailed replies on LabourList as well as on LME's own website.

Any Labour or trade union member, or member of a sister party, can join LME or register as a supporter, and a programme of national and regional activities is already underway. To find out more about our activities, show your support or sign up, visit [www.labourmovement.eu](http://www.labourmovement.eu).

## 3. Doorstep EU app

In April I launched a new app to help separate fact from fiction in the UK's debate about the EU. The app is called Doorstep EU, and it can be downloaded for free from the Google Play store (for Android phones and tablets) and the iOS App Store (for Apple phones and tablets).

The app's 'Behind the Headlines' area offers regularly updated analysis of EU-related stories in

the UK and international media, with links to detailed background information to help make sense of what's being claimed and whether it's accurate. There are also short, punchy briefings on EU key issues, a dedicated Mythbusters section, and a mobile version of my blog.

For more information and to download the app, visit [www.richardcorbett.org.uk/app](http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk/app) or search your store for 'Doorstep EU'.

## 4. Proposed trade deal with the USA

The debate about a possible future Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US continues, with a lot of recent attention focusing on a draft resolution in the European Parliament that was eventually passed. Parliament's position includes specific protections for the NHS and public services, and binding labour, consumer and environmental safeguards.

The negotiations themselves are being conducted by the European Commission under instruction from national governments, including

Britain, and are likely not to be completed for several years. When the negotiations are complete, the final text will be submitted to MEPs for approval. By making it clear now what we will and will not accept, we can shape the negotiations over the coming years — hence the importance of our resolution, whenever it now happens.

As a Labour MEP, I am opposed to the 'investor-state dispute settlement' scheme (i.e. corporate tribunals), which has attracted more letters, calls and emails to my office than any other issue.

## 5. Conflict minerals

Minerals such as tin, tungsten, tantalum and gold are part of many European companies' supply chains. But the international trade in these minerals has also played a role in fuelling conflicts in other parts of the world, with trade profits being used to equip armed militia and support corrupt officials in troubled countries such as Burma, Colombia, DRC and Zimbabwe.

In May, Labour MEPs won a crucial vote in the European Parliament to tackle the problem. In future, companies in Europe will be legally

required to ensure that materials they use have not entered the supply chain a way that fuels armed conflict. Importantly, the rules will cover the whole supply chain, including products both manufactured and sold in the EU, not just raw minerals and ores.

Attention now turns to EU governments, who must also approve these new rules before they can enter into force. We will keep up the pressure to make sure Parliament's strong position isn't watered down.

## 6. Constituency visits

This year, I've been visiting major employers in Yorkshire & Humber, not least for discussions on how various EU policies affect them.

Reflecting on these experiences, two things strike me. The first is simply pride: I'm amazed by the diversity and international reach of the work that's done in our region. Whether it's developing the next generation of healthcare technology, cutting-edge biomass energy and carbon capture, food processing or transport, Yorkshire & Humber is a leading light not just in the UK but around the world. We have plenty to be proud of!

The second point my visits have hammered home to me is a more political one. Much has been made in recent months — and quite rightly — of the overwhelming demand from British businesses for the UK to stay at the heart of the EU. I certainly heard that opinion expressed wherever I went.

But this is not just about market access. Whether we're a member or not, Britain's exporters would still find themselves dealing with the European Union every day: it is the world's biggest market, after all. And that market has rules to ensure a level playing field and to

protect consumers, workers and the environment. Of course, every organisation I spoke to had a list of priorities for them — areas where they want to see those common rules improved, repealed, deepened or streamlined, to improve their business's effectiveness. Since all EU rules come before the European Parliament, companies are naturally keen to set out their position for me, and in return I was (sometimes!) able to give advice about the legislative procedure or undertake to look into particular issues. These conversations — like those I have regularly with workers, unions, campaigning organisations and individual citizens — are a healthy part of a functioning democracy and help to keep us focused on our jobs.

So when we talk about the importance of the UK having a seat “around the table” in Europe, we don't just mean that one particular EU Council table where national governments meet to agree legislation. We mean, too, the countless tables up and down the country where interested citizens meet elected representatives or government ministers to discuss improvements to current or future European policy.

## 7. Regional Policy Forum: save the date!

Every autumn, my colleague Linda McAvan MEP and I jointly organise a Regional Policy Forum for Labour party members across Yorkshire & Humber. This is a major annual event in the regional party's calendar, usually attracting some 100-150 members.

This year's Regional Policy Forum will take place on Saturday 21 November at Leeds Beckett University (formerly Leeds

Metropolitan University). The focus will be on Britain's place in the European Union, both now and in the future. As well as providing an opportunity to ask questions of your Labour MEPs and find out more about our work, the event will include high-profile keynote speakers and hands-on workshops.

Tickets will be available later in the summer. Admission will be free, but booking essential.

## 8. eCall

In April, the European Parliament approved one piece of EU legislation that everyone considers a good idea — everyone, that is, except the Conservatives, the Front National, and UKIP.

The proposal was to include an inbuilt 'eCall' mechanism in new car manufacturing specifications. In the event of a serious accident, the system would automatically call the emergency services and furnish them with location details. This could save thousands of lives, as ambulances can get to an accident more quickly and directly, even when the victims are unconscious or simply don't know exactly where

they are. And the cost of this innovation is very low — even the highest estimate is that it would be no more than £80 per car.

Some have worried that such a system would be an intrusion of privacy, as a crash would automatically trigger a message giving your location away. But if you seriously believe that the emergency services (the data doesn't go anywhere else) being able to locate your car is an invasion of privacy in the event of an accident, then presumably you want to abolish number plates too as an invasion of privacy!

## 9. Waterloo 200

I was delighted to represent MEPs at the service of commemoration at St Paul's Cathedral in June, marking the 200th anniversary of a battle that changed the face of Europe.

The Battle of Waterloo's consequences remain extremely significant in the ongoing historical narrative of Britain's relationship with the rest of Europe — but there is far much more to this story than nationalism. The battle ended over 20 years of conflict in Europe and brought about over 50 years of peace and stability. Eventually war raged again on our continent — many more times up until 1945 — but Waterloo reminds us that

shifting national alliances are simply not a recipe for stability.

Indeed, the original motivation behind the creation of the European Union was about saying 'never again' to war. After World War II, we simply had to find a permanently better way of doing things — to substitute age-old rivalries by merging their essential interests — to create the basis for a community among peoples who had been long divided by conflict.

Of course, we still have robust arguments – but we now we have them across a debating chamber or a negotiating table. It's somewhat better!

## 10. Freedom of panorama

We got a sneak preview in June of the underhand tactics UKIP intend to deploy in their attempts to whip up anti-European hysteria in the run-up to the planned referendum. They put out a press release claiming that “Brussels” was going to ban holiday snaps of “copyrighted” buildings and monuments.

The claim was a fabrication, 'inspired' by a parliamentary

discussion which was about commercial copyright (not holiday snaps) and wasn't a law, nor even a proposal for one. It was an idea mooted as part of a general, non-legislative discussion about copyright — and, as it happens, one that was thrown out by Parliament a few weeks later. But I guarantee the right-wing press will recycle the myth in a year or two's time, when they need a eurosceptic headline for a summer holiday story.

## 11. UKIP's revolving door

Another day, another UKIP MEP is suspended from the party following an expenses scandal. In March, Janice Atkinson — UKIP MEP for the South East and general election candidate for Folkestone and Hythe — was suspended from UKIP following allegations of a serious financial nature. Barely a couple of months later, she announced that she was leaving UKIP's parliamentary group (they never got round to expelling her) to form a new far-right alliance with the Front National in France.

Time and time again, Farage has tried to distance himself from UKIP's endless parade of suspensions, scandals, resignations and defections. After no fewer than 25% of all UKIP MEPs in the 2004-2009 Parliament had left UKIP for one of these reasons — several in trouble with the law — Farage told us that these were teething

problems for a new party, and that they would choose their candidates more carefully in the future.

But in the 2009-2014 Parliament, things got even worse. Well over a third (5 out of 13) of their MEPs were no longer with them by the end. Of these, two jumped ship to the Tories — though they did receive a Tory defector in return, the climate change denier Roger Helmer — and another was arrested and charged.

Ahead of last year's European elections, we were yet again told that UKIP's revolving door was a thing of the past. But, less than a year into the five-year parliament, two have already gone. In all, since 2005, UKIP has chalked up an astounding 5 suspensions, 3 defections, 1 arrest and 2 convictions!

### Constituency mailbag

I received about **11,500** emails and letters in total since March. The top three issues of concern from my mailbag are:

TTIP and ISDS  
Freedom of panorama  
VAT on sanitary products

### Website traffic

Since March, about **9000** different people have visited my website. The most popular content in this period was:

Page about my Doorstep EU app  
Blog post on EU budget reform  
Blog post on Scotland & the EU

You can download a copy of this report in electronic format from [www.richardcorbett.org.uk](http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk), where you can also view my previous quarterly reports and read regular updates from my blog.

To request printed copies, including in an alternate format or in large print, please email [richard@richardcorbett.org.uk](mailto:richard@richardcorbett.org.uk).

## Find out more online

My website, [www.richardcorbett.org.uk](http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk), is updated regularly with news, views and analysis on EU and Labour Party topics. If you subscribe to my newsletter online, you'll be sent an email whenever I add new content.

You can also follow me on Twitter [@rcorbettmep](https://twitter.com/rcorbettmep), and on Facebook by 'liking' **Richard Corbett MEP**.

As a group of Labour MEPs, we have a shared website where you can read press releases, download resources and browse all Labour representatives in the European Parliament. [www.eurolabour.org.uk](http://www.eurolabour.org.uk)



## Doorstep EU

For up-to-the-minute analysis of media headlines on Europe as well as briefings on key issues, check out [richardcorbett.org.uk/app](http://richardcorbett.org.uk/app)

## Meetings and events attended since March 2014

(other than regular parliamentary meetings) \* denotes events where I was guest speaker

### Yorkshire & Humber

Extensive election campaigning in Calder Valley, Colne Valley, Bradford East, Bradford West, Keighley, Dewsbury, Pudsey, Elmet & Rothwell, Grimsby, Brigg & Goole, and Leeds North West

Additional election campaigning in Halifax, Shipley, Bradford South, Wentworth & Dearne, Penistone & Stockbridge, and York Central

Hugh Bayley retirement event

Hull port

Vivergo

Smith & Nephew

Benenden Healthcare

Srebrenica genocide commemoration\*

Wrose carnival

Barclays Bank

Yorkshire Building Society

Drax power station

Angela Smith MP

Mary Creagh MP

Lord Prescott

Lord Wallace and Professor Helen Wallace

Several TTIP events\*

Kirklees Campaign Against Climate Change\*

Andrew Clayton (PEW UK)

Labour leadership hustings

Workers' Education Association\*

Kashmir Martyrs' Day dinner\*

European Movement Yorkshire & Humber\*

### Brussels, Strasbourg

Recreational fishing conference\*

Women in fisheries event

Representative of Citi

Open Society Institute\*

LOW Associates

European Trade Unions (several meetings)

Swedish management group

Universities UK\*

Amcham

President Martin Schulz

UK civil servants\*

Norwegian minister for industry, trade & fisheries

Luxembourg minister

Swiss ambassador

Belgian ambassador

New Zealand ambassador

Chief Minister of Gibraltar

Moldovan MPs & staff

UKREP (two meetings)

David Liddington MP, Minister for Europe

Tom Watson MP

Supporting British Gin

Debate with Andrew Lansley MP\*

Eurochambres event on better lawmaking\*

British Chamber of Commerce

Alan Johnson MP

Caroline Flint MP

Ben Bradshaw MP

Lord Liddle

Dublin Chamber of Commerce

IEP/UCP seminar on policy-making\*

Stella Creasy MP

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Australian Business Council

Grayling debate on Brexit\*

Labour leadership hustings

European Network Against Racism

Jonathan Faull, European Commission

### London & others

Sustainable fisheries film\*

Universities UK conference\*

European Movement\*

Labour Movement for Europe\*

Chatham House referendum debate\*

Waterloo 200 events

IPPR event on freedom of movement\*

EU ambassador to USA

Meetings in US Congress with members of trade committee and Speaker John Boehner

### Media interviews

BBC TV News, Sunday Politics, Look North

Local & regional BBC radio

Sustainable fisheries film

Politico

French TV stations\*

Catalan TV

Sky News

Irish TV

LBC Radio

Spanish TV

French radio

Italian TV

Belgian TV

Various newspapers, agencies and online publications

things eurosceptics  
DON'T WANT YOU  
TO KNOW

#1

The entire EU budget is  
**less than**  
**1%**  
**of GDP.**  
(For comparison, the UK  
government budget is 40%.)

Evidence: bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-1645975 richardcorbett.org.uk

richardcorbett.org.uk

things eurosceptics  
DON'T WANT YOU  
TO KNOW

#2

The European Court  
of Human Rights  
was invented by the  
**BRITISH**  
after World War II.  
(It has nothing to do with  
the European Union.)

Evidence: journalonline.co.uk/Magazine/56-9/1010095.aspx

things eurosceptics  
DON'T WANT YOU  
TO KNOW

#3

Each year we sell  
**more to**  
**Holland**  
alone  
than to the whole  
of the Commonwealth.  
(More than £24 billion in 2013.)

Evidence: bit.ly/ncqWVJ richardcorbett.org.uk

richardcorbett.org.uk

things eurosceptics  
DON'T WANT YOU  
TO KNOW

#4

The majority of  
**UK**  
**IMMIGRATION**  
comes from  
outside the EU.  
(And it's totally up to us  
how we deal with it.)

Evidence: fullfact.org/immigration/what\_immigration\_is\_nationalists\_uk\_30857

things eurosceptics  
DON'T WANT YOU  
TO KNOW

#5

Non-EU countries  
**Switzerland &**  
**Norway**  
both have much  
**HIGHER**  
EU immigration than Britain.

Evidence: bit.ly/nc8tUS richardcorbett.org.uk

richardcorbett.org.uk

things eurosceptics  
DON'T WANT YOU  
TO KNOW

#6

The US,  
Australia,  
Canada &  
Ireland  
have all  
gone on  
record to  
**urge**  
us to stay  
in the **EU**

(We don't have to take their  
advice, but sometimes it's  
good to listen to your friends.)

Evidence: bit.ly/nc8tUS; abc.co.uk/2014/08/14/17/19/nc8tUS