

Jim Allister MEP - *Leading for Ulster*

BRUSSELS BRIEFING

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Referendum demanded in Strasbourg protest



Traditional Unionist MEP Jim Allister was among a large group of Eurosceptic MEPs who demonstrated in the Strasbourg Parliament to demand a referendum on the new EU Reform Treaty (Constitution), on the day before it was signed by European Heads of Government.

The vigorous protest centred, from the UK perspective, on the fact that despite the Reform Treaty delivering everything the Constitution provided for, the British Government has reneged on its manifesto commitment to hold a referendum. Using the signing of the Constitution's Charter on Fundamental Rights as the occasion, the protesting MEPs highlighted the denial of the right to vote in pushing through the Constitution without referenda.

Speaking earlier in the debate on the subject Jim Allister said:-

"We talk grandly about European values of democracy. Today we will have a pretentious affirmation of belief in Human Rights. Yet at the same time, the EU elite are preparing to celebrate their greatest stroke of arrogance to date, as they make ready to sign the repackaged Constitution, without a backward glance to what their people want or think.

The 2005 referenda showed Europe out of touch, but the lesson learnt is not to abandon what the people don't want, but to circumvent their opposition by determining this time not to ask them. Hence, the scandal that across this continent national powers will be stripped away, superstatehood structures will be established, a new EU citizenship will be created, legal personality will be bestowed on the EU, and only a handful of citizens will ever be asked. Why? Because in most states, my own included, the leaders fear the verdict of the people, adding cowardice to arrogance.

So on a day when there is much talk of human rights, I say give the peoples of Europe the basic political and human right, the right to say yes or no to how they should be governed. The right to say yes or no to this Constitution in referenda."

Chuckling on tour with a Chuckie

Sinn Fein's military wing murders Paul Quinn and a month later Ian Paisley goes on tour in the USA with Martin McGuinness as if nothing had ever happened. What a farce!

It used to be that Unionists went to America to counter republican propaganda, now they join forces with those they



long denounced as unrepentant terrorists.

How bizarre that on a visit supposed to promote Northern Ireland the deputy First Minister can't even use the name of the state he jointly presides over. So much for his transition that it still has to be the republican speak of 'the north'.

Government failing our children—MEP

Statement by Jim Allister MEP

“With less than two months remaining before CCEA’s deadline for direction relating to post-primary education, the Minister for Education has proposed a system which has left the Assembly deadlocked. Ruane’s proposals, the abolition of academic selection and “moving the point of transition to 14” (whatever that means), would necessitate a massive change in relation to education in Northern Ireland. She is a minister out of her depth and driven by socialist political dogma.

Whereas Ruane’s ruinous proposal cannot pass without cross community backing, the question remains as to how a solution is actually found. The options seem to be deadlock or a mish-mash compromise based, not on educational imperatives, but the political imperative of agreement for agreement’s sake. Meantime our children and their parents are the ones to suffer.

The absurdity of government by mutual veto means that the important question of how post primary education will work remains unanswered. This issue clearly demonstrates that devolved government as presently constituted is bad government - unable to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland on the big issues and, in this instance, failing our children.”



Allister comments on McAliskey decision

The politically convenient judicial decision in the Roisin McAliskey case is a significant setback for the European Arrest Warrant system.

At a time when the EU has been getting its act

together on anti-terrorism measures, it is highly regrettable that from a decision in the UK comes a rebuff. No doubt this retrograde decision will be latched onto by others resisting extradition throughout Europe.

Allister raises EU firearm anomaly

During a debate in the European Parliament on the acquisition and possession of weapons in the EU, Jim Allister MEP raised an anomaly in how current EU regulations are applied which is disadvantaging those promoting hunting holidays in Northern Ireland.

A European Firearms Pass exists for carrying weapons from one member state to another, but, uniquely within the EU, the UK police require production of the original of the Pass weeks in advance of a visit, whereas other countries accept production at the border. Thus, to come to the UK to hunt is much more burdensome for Europeans than to go elsewhere and, in consequence Northern Ireland and GB are losing out.

In highlighting this anomaly Jim Allister said:-

“I want to draw attention to the unequal way in

which the European Firearms Pass operates in practice, particularly as it affects the hunting fraternity.

If the owner of a registered weapon wishes to go hunting in another EU country he simply produces his Europass at his point of entry, but if he wants to enter the UK he must supply his original Europass in advance and then wait 6-8 weeks for it to be processed by the local police. Thus he is without his pass for that time and can't hunt in any third country in the meantime. There is no need for this bureaucracy, which is severely damaging the promotion of hunting holidays in the UK, including my constituency of Northern Ireland. Surely an advance photocopy of the pass should suffice.

I trust, therefore, that this anomaly will be addressed.”

Barroso tells Republic to behave on Treaty ratification

European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso has called upon Ireland - so far the only country holding a referendum on the new EU treaty - not to cause trouble in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty across the EU.

The treaty, signed by 27 EU leaders in Lisbon on 13 December, is expected to be put to a popular vote in the Republic early next summer.

Other EU states where the possibility of a referendum was debated - the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK - have said they will opt for parliamentary ratification instead, because of fear of popular rejection, making it likely that shamefully the Irish will be the only people in Europe allowed to vote on the treaty.

Although the Irish are generally seen as having a positive outlook on Europe, the upcoming referendum is viewed with some nervousness in Brussels, with a recent opinion poll indicating some 62 percent of Irish remained undecided on

the new treaty.

Some officials in Brussels have suggested that public discussions on some sensitive treaty-related issues better be avoided in order not to derail the Irish government's "yes" campaign.

Ireland's sensitivities include defence policy - stemming from the country's tradition of neutrality - as well as taxation and justice issues and any signs of a loss of power to big member states.

In 2001, the Irish caused a major upset in the EU when they voted against the EU's Nice Treaty, mainly because of neutrality concerns. The government could only approve 'Nice' after it won a second vote in 2002.



Useful insight into Sinn Fein strategy

A recent interview with Sinn Fein in the "Kashmir Times" gives an interesting insight into their strategy and use of the Stormont Executive as a stepping stone to Irish unity. The extracts speak for themselves:-

"We have (our) own objectives because it is important to build on progress which has been achieved. Our real objective is Irish unity. Our objective doesn't certainly lie in this building (Stormont)...Our destination lies in the Irish unity. But, we believe that objective is very different from strategy. What we are doing today is a strategy to achieve (our) goal.

Our long term strategy is seeking self-

determination for Irish people. Objective and strategy are two different things. We have not forgotten our objective. But, there are issues in the way...Our focus right now is to build roads infrastructure between Northern Ireland and in South with Republic of Ireland. We are seeking building physical as well as economic, social, and political infrastructure. There are a number of areas of cooperation. Regional development as well as agriculture is our priority.

Rural country had been unionist dominated. We have targeted agriculturalists and are persuading them to understand our goal. At the end of the day what people have in their pockets and their lives makes a broader strategy."

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What you need to know about the Renamed EU Constitution

Reflection by Roger Helmer MEP, Chairman of the Freedom Association

"Flying to Brussels this month, I sat next to an industrial psychologist on her way to Barcelona. We fell into conversation, and she remarked that the Lisbon Treaty (a.k.a. the Renamed Constitution) was too difficult for the average punter to understand. I replied that all she really needed to know could be told in five minutes – so she asked me to do so.

When I'd finished, she was kind enough to say that she had a new understanding of the subject, so it's perhaps worth repeating.

First, while there are technical differences between the Constitution that failed in 2005 and the new Treaty, the practical effect is virtually identical, so Gordon Brown's excuse for breaking his word on a referendum is indefensible.

The treaty gives away national vetoes in (depending how you count them) around 50 policy areas, including energy, border control, tourism, space exploration, and so on. My interlocutor rightly remarked that we had given Brussels our North Sea fisheries decades ago, and we now seemed about to give them our North Sea oil – a point I have made many times.

The Treaty establishes a semi-permanent President of the Commission. We were promised by Labour earlier this year that they would not allow the combination of the posts of President of the Commission and of the Council – yet this now seems to be allowed by the Treaty. It is another step on the road to a United States of Europe. There will also be (in effect) an EU Foreign Minister, although they have changed the name. As German Chancellor Angela Merkel put it, "cosmetic changes and different terminology, but with the same legal effect".

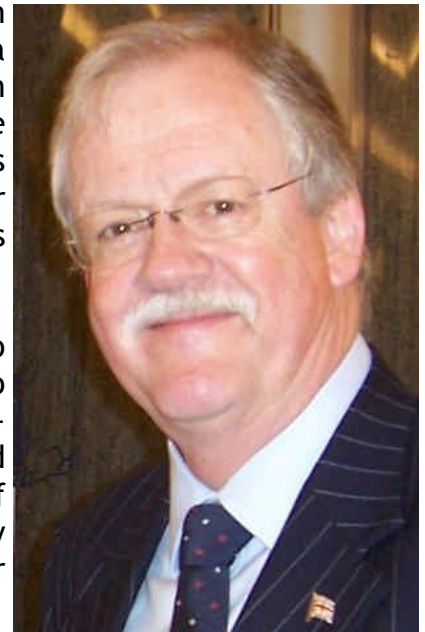
There are two other changes which are remarkably sinister.

The first sounds dry and technical, perhaps appealing only to constitutional lawyers. It gives the EU a "legal personality". This means that it can sit in its own right in international bodies and sign treaties on behalf of member-states. It would open the way for the EU to take over Britain's permanent seat on the UN Security Council, for example.

But it also marks the point at which we can no longer pretend that the EU is a free association of independent states (even if that is true today, which is in doubt). With a legal personality, the EU is more like a country, and less like an association of countries. It crosses the threshold to statehood.

And the second change: this is a "self-amending" treaty. It gives the EU institutions powers to pursue further integration without limit, and behind closed doors. Today, a new EU Treaty must be ratified at least by parliament, and we can have a realistic debate about whether it also demands ratification by the people in a referendum. In future, powers can be grabbed by Brussels without even our House of Commons having a say.

That is why it is so vitally important to press for a referendum on this Renamed Constitution. For if we fail now, we may never have another chance."



Varney explodes Devolution blarney

"The outcome of the Varney Review - when contrasted with the hype and exaggerated claims from Stormont that accompanied its establishment - is a huge disappointment. Just like the promised mega financial package, it has turned out to be a damp squib.

I'm not surprised, because such was the desperation of local politicians to get into office

that they had no bargaining power with Whitehall. Brown and Blair had their measure, namely that they were so bursting for power that they could be fobbed off with anything, and so they were. The pretence that lower corporation tax would be attained and that a massive financial package would be extracted from the Treasury, now stand exposed as part of a con perfected on the Northern Ireland electorate."

Statement by Jim Allister MEP announcing the launch of new Political Movement

“With both Unionist parties now enthusiastically working and implementing the Belfast Agreement, Unionists who reject it are disenfranchised. This is not in the interests of Unionism, because it will encourage a diminishing unionist vote, as many feel they now have no one to vote for. Thus, with others, I have been persuaded of the necessity of providing an organisation to mobilise and give voice to such legitimate opinion.

Today, therefore, I am pleased to announce the launch of **“TRADITIONAL UNIONIST VOICE”**. This launch is the product of work behind the scenes in recent months within the unionist community. In consequence branches already exist in 12 of the 18 constituencies, with work continuing to complete and expand the network right across the Province.

Traditional Unionist Voice has four founding principles which encapsulate where Traditional Unionists stand. We are

- wholly committed to the Union;
- desirous of devolution compatible with democratic principles and precedents prevailing elsewhere in the UK, thus causing us to reject the present undemocratic mandatory coalition model which puts Sinn Fein in government;
- adamant that the rule of law must prevail in every part of Northern Ireland and be administered without fear or favour;
- supportive of traditional family values.

Thus, TUV will occupy the traditional unionist ground so wantonly abandoned by others for the sake of office.

Tens of thousands of unionists feel sickened and deflated by the spectacle of IRA/Sinn Fein at the heart of our government, having been put there by those they trusted in the past. To them I say, you are not alone, ours is an honourable and legitimate view and together we can make it count.”

Copies of the leaflet announcing the formation of Traditional Unionist Voice are available from Mr Allister’s office.



STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FROM COUNCILLORS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

“We greatly welcome the formation of Traditional Unionist Voice. At grassroots level we are very aware that thousands of Unionists feel betrayed and disenfranchised by the DUP’s rush into government with Sinn Fein.

We look forward to working with like-minded Unionists to establish and grow a vibrant voice within local government opposing Sinn Fein and fighting for the traditional unionist values upon

which we were elected.”

Cllr Frazer Agnew (Newtownabbey), Ald James Alexander (Ballymena), Ald Cecil Calvert (Lisburn), Cllr Leslie Cubitt (Limavady), Cllr Boyd Douglas (Limavady), Ald Roy Gillespie (Ballmena), Cllr Sam Gaston (Ballymena), Cllr Stephen Herron (Banbridge), Cllr Mel Lucas (Antrim), Ald Jack McKee (Larne), Cllr Audrey Patterson (Ballymoney), Cllr Mark Russell (Craigavon), Cllr Robin Sterling (Ballymena), Cllr Charlie Tosh (Castlereagh), Cllr David Tweed (Ballymena), Cllr William Wilkinson (Ballymena)

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT BY FORMER MP FOR EAST LONDONDERRY, WILLIAM ROSS

“When the Rev Ian Paisley and his party did their about turn and embraced joint rule of Northern Ireland with those whose policy was the destruction of the Union, the Unionist people were stunned into silence and bewilderment.

It was, however, clear to me that basic Unionist principles had not gone away and that the deep, bitter anger so evident and so widespread in the Unionist community would eventually find a means of expressing itself.

I therefore very much welcome the launch of Traditional Unionist Voice as the first public manifestation of the fight back against the betrayal of our inheritance, and of integrity and common decency in politics.

This movement is a platform for all whose political involvement and activity is driven by policy and not by egotistical personality and personal ambition. I would urge all who value the Union to give it their moral and practical support.”

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT BY THE GRAND CHAPLAIN OF THE ORANGE ORDER, REV STEPHEN DICKINSON

“Many within the Christian community and the Orange family have been disgusted with the delivery of IRA/Sinn Fein into Government. Many feel totally betrayed by the DUP’s u-turn on fundamental issues and the ease with which they can work so happily together with self confessed IRA men and convicted terrorists. The price to achieve this charade has been the innocent blood of many members of the B Specials, RUC, RUCR,

UDR, RIR, the British Army, the Loyal Orders as well as other innocent members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.

The DUP and other pro-agreement unionists have miserably failed the people of Ulster and so many will welcome the establishment of a movement based on Traditional Unionist values that will give a clear, strong, principled and positive voice back to the Unionist community again. It is time in the day of evil to take a stand, and having done all, to stand!”

Arlene Foster Answered

Statement by Jim Allister **MEP**:

“Mrs Foster’s attack upon Traditional Unionist Voice displays wonderful inventiveness. She claims we choose to ignore the fact that Sinn Fein are under pressure. Where is this pressure coming from? Certainly not the DUP who seem prepared to ignore a brutal murder. A statement from her party colleague Sammy Wilson takes pride of place on the DUP website today. It makes no mention of the fact that the IMC blamed the IRA for the murder of Paul Quinn while hailing the last IMC report as evidence that Republicans are committed to peaceful and democratic means” - a strange way to keep pressure on republicans!

Mrs Foster goes on to assert that the current arrangements are working to the benefit of everyone. Tell that to the victims of terrorism who have yet to see the implementation of Bertha McDougal’s report and the appointment of a new victims’ commissioner. Tell that to the parents who do not know what the educational future of their children is after the



shambles surrounding post-primary education - courtesy of the Sinn Fein/IRA education minister who holds office because of the DUP’s agreement to work the Belfast Agreement.

Mrs Foster’s reference to Private Frazer suggests that she is a Dad’s Army fan. She will therefore be familiar with Corporal Jones whose frequent refrain was, “*Don’t panic! Don’t panic!*” The DUP may claim that the Union is stronger than ever but the truth is that Unionists can do nothing in the Assembly without the agreement of Sinn Fein/IRA. A letter cannot even leave the First Minister’s office unless it is sanctioned by McGuinness. And the ultimate obscenity of the Belfast Agreement d’hondt - which denies people their fundamental democratic right to vote a party out of office - remains. This formula is not used anywhere else in the world as a means of forming a government, much less Britain, the cradle of Parliamentary democracy.

For a Party which would write Traditional Unionist Voice off as irrelevant, they have devoted a lot of energy to attacking it, more than they devote to challenging Sinn Fein, alas. Traditional Unionist Voice’s success will be able to be measured in the increasing vitriol of those it threatens.”

Sacrificing moral integrity

Commenting on a recent vote on a report on extremism in the European Parliament, Jim Allister said:

“As a representative from a region, Northern Ireland, where Sinn Fein, affiliates of a terrorist organisation, which recently murdered a young man Paul Quinn, has been admitted to government in a coalition with exclusively democratic parties, I was encouraged to note

and vote for Amendment 14 which was in the following terms:

“Deplores the fact that some mainstream parties have seen fit to give credibility and acceptance to extremist parties by entering into coalition agreements, thereby sacrificing their moral integrity for the sake of short term political gain and expediency”

Allister lambasts DUP/Sinn Fein coalition

Speaking following an auction at a fund-raising dinner in South Antrim for Traditional Unionist Voice, Jim Allister MEP lambasted the present DUP/Sinn Fein regime.

In the course of his remarks Mr Allister said:-



“Tonight we’ve just auctioned some fine items for a fair price, and in a good cause, but over the last few months in Ulster some have sold far more precious things for far, far less.

Long held principles of the never, never variety have gone for the baubles of high, but shared, office; no terrorists in government was traded for an IOU in vanishing ink, meaninglessly called a “pledge of office”; democratic government was surrendered for the absurdity of mandatory coalition, whereby you can never vote a party out of office, nor have an Opposition; and long-standing, principled rejection of the iniquitous Belfast Agreement was meekly given up for empty cosmetic tinkering of no substantive value.

As if all that wasn’t bad enough, the lowest bidder, IRA/Sinn Fein, was rewarded with the unbelievable give-away that they can hold onto the pride of their military structures, the Army Council, meaning that at every Executive meeting Mr P O’Neill is the unseen guest, and as a final

sweetener they were given a pack of “get out of jail free” cards to be used when they feel the need to do the odd murder. One was just recently cashed in by the South Armagh brigade when they murdered Paul Quinn. Because of the sordid DUP/Sinn Fein deal and

their mutual vested interest, the DUP, mark my words, will do nothing about that brutal killing, other than to twist and turn to pretend it wasn’t what it patently was, the IRA enforcing its writ in its territory. It was murder and it was murder by the IRA and because they’ll get away with it, it won’t be the last IRA murder.

This is the crooked political environment in which we now live, where that which is morally wrong is deemed politically right and those stained by the blood of the innocents rule over us and a state which they not only don’t accept, but are pledged to destroy.

Against this dismal background, I have, however, one piece of good news for Unionism. Shortly, I expect the launch of a political movement to provide a voice for those presently disenfranchised, which will hold the respectable traditional unionist ground once held by those who shamefully swung open the door of government to IRA/Sinn Fein.”

Allister writes to Chief Constable regarding Orange Hall attacks

Following two more malicious attacks on Orange Halls, Jim Allister MEP has written to the Chief Constable today protesting at the both the lack of arrests and his delaying tactics in issuing Certificates to speed compensation.

Commenting Mr Allister said, "It is clear that republicanism is intent on pushing ahead with its war on unionist culture. Hence the sustained and intensified campaign this year on Orange Halls. The pattern of the Chief Constable being so tardy in granting Certificates to fast-track compensation, raises issues of why the police aren't doing all they could to help those subjected to this sectarian hatred."

In his letter to the Chief Constable the MEP says:-

Dear Chief Constable,

Following two more malicious attacks on Orange Halls over the past weekend, I write to express my deep disappointment at the lack of apparent progress in bringing the perpetrators to justice and at the your diffidence and delay in issuing Chief Constable's Certificates.

Such appalling attacks are bad enough but when they are met by procrastination by the police in facilitating compensation claims, then it adds to the anger of the community being subjected to such sustained sectarian attack.

Please advise me of the total number of malicious attacks on Orange halls this year, the number of people arrested in connection with such attacks, the number charged and the number of Chief Constable Certificates issued.

All-Ireland harmonisation is underway

Speaking to members of *Traditional Unionist Voice* in Newtownards, Jim Allister MEP said under devolution we have seen a dramatic escalation in north/southern, which itself demonstrated the dynamic and purpose of the Belfast Agreement.

In the course of his remarks Mr Allister said:-

“One of the cons perfected on the unionist electorate was that if we didn’t take the devolution on offer, we’d be overwhelmed by all-Ireland developments. In fact under this devolution we’ve experienced unparalleled all-Ireland promotion. Our infrastructure, our energy, our economy are now all orientated far more on an all-island basis than ever before. Sinn Fein Ministers are driving through their all-Ireland agenda with apparent impunity. Gildernew’s every thought is of all-Ireland agriculture, Murphy’s priority is cross-border, all-Ireland infrastructure and this week we saw that what really motivates Ruane, in her dismantling of our prized education system, is the alignment of our system with that prevailing in the Republic.

Some seem not to have noticed but what Ruane is seeking to do is secure an all-island approach where transfer occurs at 14 with no academic selection. This is the essence of her approach; it’s no coincidence that it matches what prevails south of the border and, of course, already she is proposing free movement of pupils north and south.

Step by step that which separates and distinguishes us from the Republic is being diluted. Even in energy we are to be an island

“Who do you think you are kidding, Mr Donaldson?”

Following a meeting with the Chief Constable DUP MP Jeffrey Donaldson tells us that there will be no devolution of policing and justice powers unless and until the IRA Army Council is disbanded.

Interesting, until you recollect the not too distant past history of the DUP on this very issue. The “removal of terrorist structures” including the Army Council was among the conditions for Sinn Fein entry to an Executive in the now infamous DUP Party Executive Resolution of November 2006.

The removal of the Army Council was a line in

unit. When first envisaged it was packaged as north-south and east-west, of late the focus is primarily north-south.

No one should be surprised to see this unfold under the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, because its ethos, purpose and method is to build unification by stages. It’s premised upon it being a short step from economic fusion to political fusion. Hence the plausible pitch of ever-closer ties for mutual benefit, to be followed in due course, by the contention that to make it all work better we need matching political structures. This is exactly how the EU has evolved to the point where now high level political structures (the Constitution) are being introduced to give “better efficiency”.

If anyone is in any doubt that this is the intended projectory of the Belfast Agreement, they need only look at the reality that the **only referendum** Northern Ireland is ever again to be permitted is one asking if we wish to join the Republic. Under the legislation when the Secretary of State thinks there is a prospect of a “yes” vote he must put the question and then every 7 years thereafter! So it’s very clear what the intended long-term outcome of the Belfast Agreement is.

Sadly, those that used to see this are now working the very Agreement they so denounced.

Yet, another reason why we need Traditional Unionist Voice.”

the sand apparently, until the winds of political expediency and party interests blew and the line disappeared, along with quite an impressive list of other so-called preconditions. What remained and still remains is the Army Council and a complete lack of confidence in the unionist community that the DUP now mean anything they say.



Just how intolerable is it, Jeffrey?

Jeffrey Donaldson's condemnation of a Sinn Fein calendar celebrating IRA terrorism is good as far as it goes.

Since going into government Sinn Fein have repeatedly demonstrated that their supposed commitment to the rule of law is a sham. Take, for example, the republican parade in Belfast back in August where participants wore paramilitary uniforms and carried rifles and IRA insignia. Afterwards Mr Donaldson called for prosecutions. Then he suggests that the law may well have been broken by his partners in government and again calls upon the police to investigate.

But again the most fundamental question he has to face isn't just what are the police going to do about it but what are Mr Donaldson and his party going to do about it?

Apparently he is going to ask Alex Maskey how his membership of the Policing Board is compatible with such behaviour. **A quiet word in the ear of convicted bank robber Maskey just isn't good enough, Jeffrey.**

It seems that the Lagan Valley MP doesn't believe Sinn Fein/IRA's continued glorification of terrorism - like the murder of Paul Quinn - is so "intolerable" that he can no longer remain in government with them!

Farming News

Taking intensive sector's case to Europe

A high level delegation representing the Northern Ireland Grain trade, Poultry, Red Meat and Pig sectors travelled to Strasbourg this week, to meet with European Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer-Boel.

Kenneth Sharkey, Robin Irvine, Eric Reid and Keith Smyton were part of the delegation for this high level meeting sponsored jointly by MEPs Jim Allister and Jim Nicholson. The context for the meeting was rising feed costs, but a wide range of issues were raised with the Commissioner on behalf of the sectors represented.

Jim Allister MEP said, "The intensive sectors have been hit badly by rising feed costs in recent months. We were keen that the Commissioner could hear at first hand the issues affecting these sectors. The delegation put forward robust cases for action which the Commissioner could take to improve the situation."

"One of the messages given was that Europe must speed up its GMO approvals process, and put an end to zero tolerance, or risk decimating livestock production in Europe. Of course, the need for a level playing field for the Northern Ireland industry was also stressed, including the need to act decisively against Brazilian imports which continue to fail to meet EU production standards, while undercutting local produce.



I am hopeful that the Commissioner will give her backing to making some inroads on the Brazilian issue."

"The delegation was proactive in suggesting a number of key recommendations to be taken forward by the Commissioner. Firstly, A Pig Industry Development Scheme, to assist with the transition taking place within the pig sector was raised. The need for more transparent labelling of meat at retail food service levels, and indeed the case for redefining the definition of 'fresh' poultry meat were put forward robustly. Discussions were also had on matters pertaining to the CAP Health Check, such as the failure of decoupling to recoup additional costs for the primary producer."

MEP visits O’Kane Poultry

Jim Allister MEP has paid a visit to O’Kane Poultry, where he met with Management to learn of the company’s plans for the future.

The MEP said, “I was interested to hear how O’Kane’s is beginning to realise new opportunities arising from the closure of Farm Fed Chickens last year. I was particularly encouraged to learn of ambitious plans for growing the business, which centre on increasing hatchery capacity.”



“The agri-food industry is facing a range of challenges, including rising feed costs and huge costs to comply with new EU Nitrates and Phosphates rules, while at the same time maintaining price competitiveness. The Poultry Industry is clearly positioning itself to meet

these challenges. I only hope Government will engage with the sector to create solutions, and not impede future success.”

MEP welcomes Commission u-turn on export refunds

Jim Allister MEP has welcomed a European Commission proposal to introduce export refunds for pigmeat carcasses, cuts and bellies in response to the difficult market situation.

Speaking at a European Parliament debate in October I predicted that private storage would not sufficiently address the difficulties the European pig meat sector is facing. That is why, during that debate I called on Commissioner Fischer Boel to introduce export refunds on pig meat and hams, as a means of putting a floor in the market.”

“I find it bemusing that the Commission has

been so opposed to the introduction of export refunds for months, before coming to its senses. Ironically, only last week Fischer Boel, in her CAP Health Check paper said export refunds are entering their ‘twilight years’. This u-turn on export refunds demonstrates the necessity of market support instruments for the CAP going forward.”

“Farmers could have been spared a lot of anxiety had export refunds been introduced sooner. Frankly, I am amazed it took Michelle Gildernew until 20th November to even consider raising the matter of export refunds.”

Personal protection weapons still required

Statement by Traditional Unionist MEP Jim Allister:

“It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the PSNI has made a policy decision - probably under political direction - to radically reduce the number of Personal Protection Weapons held in Northern Ireland. Hence, in recent weeks I have had several ex members of the security forces complain that their weapons have been removed upon application for renewal of their

certificates.

With republicans still active, as evidenced by recent attacks and threats, I believe this to be a retrograde and premature step. The danger is that as attacks fail on serving security personnel there could be a renewed focus on the softer targets of ex-members. Hence the folly of leaving them defenceless.”

End heavy-handed rigidity, says Allister

Speaking in a debate in the European Parliament on a report on how cross-compliance has been implemented, Traditional Unionist MEP, Jim Allister condemned "heavy-handed rigidity" by local Stormont officials and called for simplification and flexibility.

In the course of his remarks Mr Allister said:-
"Farmers are not unreasonable people, nor, are they dishonest. Yet, cross compliance treats many unfairly, with disproportionate penalties for minor offences. 68% of all cases of non-compliance are classified as minor, but the sanctions imposed are for struggling farmers often crippling.

Disparity in how cross-compliance is implemented from country to country compounds the resentments.

In Northern Ireland we have had a particular problem with "duplicate field" claims, arising from our conacre system. Instead of a pragmatic search for a solution, we've had heavy-handed rigidity. Much of the blame lies with the local Department of Agriculture, not Brussels, but each could have done more to resolve it.

So going forward, my plea is for simplification and a dose of good old common sense to replace the inflexibility of over zealous mandarins."

No to land value taxation

Jim Allister QC MEP has received a written assurance from Finance Minister Peter Robinson that he will not be recommending the introduction of taxation of agricultural land to the Executive.

The Ulster MEP said,
"In October I wrote to Peter Robinson, alarmed that land value taxation was being considered as an alternative to the current rating system. I insisted that instead of taxing agriculture further, he should be looking at ways of finding additional aid to assist the hard pressed Red Meat and Intensive Pig and Poultry sectors, particularly in light of rising feed costs."

"By way of response, Mr Robinson has said that a DFP commissioned report has confirmed that a land tax to replace the current domestic and non-domestic rating systems would be out

of line with international trends, and extremely difficult to implement, not least in relation to uncertainties around planning."

Mr Allister has also been informed that DARD will consider redirecting and refocusing resources to take account of the Red Meat Taskforce Findings.

In response to this, Mr Allister said,

"The challenges that lie ahead for the Northern Ireland Agri-food industry are great. Europe has recognised this, by enabling Member States to provide assistance under the competitiveness priority of Rural Development funds. I repeat my concerns that DARD's measly allocation towards increasing the competitiveness of our industry under the new Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme requires very urgent attention."

Jim Allister MEP - Leading for Ulster



All editions of the monthly newsletter 'Brussels Briefing' are available to download at my website, www.jimallister.org

There, you can also sign up to receive each new edition, either by post or by e-mail.

Poots' Decoy

DCAL Minister Edwin Poots, having been under pressure over his department financing gay rights festivals, has come up with a ploy to shift the focus from himself. He now proposes to give the cash to the district councils and let them fund festivals.

Of course, the fact that DCAL will still be footing the bill is the point of real significance.



Jim Allister welcoming a large group of Ulster visitors to the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Allister demands early publication of latest FVO Inspection

Jim Allister QC MEP has called on the European Commission to make public the findings of the latest FVO mission to Brazil, which took place in November.

Mr Allister said,

“The manner in which the Commission delayed publishing the March FVO inspection findings until 8 months later, was completely unacceptable. On the basis of the many recurring breaches of EU production standards detected then, and the bigger Political picture of a WTO deal pending, it is no surprise that the Commission would wish to deflect attention by arranging a further inspection, which I understand has just been completed.”

“Commissioner Kyprianou has given written assurances that the Commission is ready to take ‘further action as appropriate in light of the outcome of that (November) mission’.

Therefore, I have tabled the following Parliamentary Question to Mr Kyprianou:

When will the Commission make public the findings of the latest FVO inspection in Brazil, and when will a decision be taken on imposing import restriction measures if shortcomings were detected as in the previous inspections in March 2007 and in 2006?

**Season's
greetings
and Happy
New Year
from your
MEP Jim
Allister**

