

Report from Bill in Strasbourg in December

Hello friend!

Walking into the European Parliament last Monday - where Europe's decisions are made – I thought to myself “From the end of January there will no longer be a British voice here. Yet Britain will still have to obey most of the EU rules. But not have any say in making and enforcing them. It seems so stupid.”

The failure has been at Westminster by the culture of two main parties. MPs have failed to understand that our place in the world is not what it was, that we do not make the world's rules any longer, that we are no a superpower. But that now we are pushed around by superpowers.

That's why Brexit is going to prove so damaging. “Take control back” is such a stupid slogan, We will have thrown away our share of control of the EU economic superpower.

It's an act of self-harm, driven by populist discontent and a misleading slogan Get Brexit Done - when Brexit will drag on through 2020 and perhaps longer.

Britain will now lose EU funds for joint research, by universities and businesses. As the Financial Times wrote last weekend, “Brits can look forward to seeing the hormone-laden beef, genetically-modified food and chlorine-dipped chicken that is banned by the EU.”

People asked me “How is it possible for a non-elected Prime Minister to ask a non-elected Head of State to suspend a half-non-elected parliament?”

Meanwhile

The European Parliament's annual Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought was awarded to Ilham Tohti, a Yughur leader who has been imprisoned for life “for having extremist and separatist thoughts” by the Chinese government in a “re-education” centre. His daughter came to Strasbourg to talk about him and accept the prize on his behalf.

At a breakfast, a French professor who specializes in human rights spoke: she thought that the desire in China not to allow minorities or different religions to exist is not a fear about China splitting up (“because a United States of China would be easier to govern”) but because President-Dictators are psychologically split-personalities: they want to believe their obsession that everything they do is perfect despite knowing that there is considerable opposition to them within their own country.

New Rules for Truck drivers

Have been agreed between the three separate EU bodies which create laws jointly, the Commission, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

New rules about posting drivers to other member states, new rules about maximum daily and weekly driving timed, and rest periods and new tachographs. And new

rules for Cabotage (which is, for example, a French driver picking up a load in Germany and taking it to drive into the EU Greece).

If British truck drivers wish to enter the EU after Brexit, they will have to obey these new rules, including having the new EU tachographs. But without any British say in making the rules. (This is not creating extra rules : each single EU rule replaces 27 or 28 different national rules, an EU rule means a bonfire of national rules.)

When? Final vote in the parliament is timetabled for April.

### Constitutional changes coming for Europe

The EU needs reform. Everybody agrees. A major public consultation is now being prepared in the parliament and will be announced in January and formally launched on 9<sup>th</sup> May (Europe Day).

The consultation is likely to have two 'pillars' : one pillar being several Citizens Assemblies, chosen from applications on the internet and balanced by age and origin and experience, and meeting in different European locations and debating different topics: the other pillar to be Institutional (MEPs, the EU Commission with three members specifically responsible, and the Council of 27 national ministers).

The process may last two and a half years and then will lead to a formal Constitutional Convention. Merkel and Macron are 'onboard' with these plans. The process will be completely transparent, in public

Why is it necessary? The EU's last evolutionary step was the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. With many internal inconsistencies the EU needs to evolve, so that it can react to the super-powers. Britain, if Brexit happens, will not be consulted. The EU-15 was coherent but an EU of 28 or 30 countries does not. There is still a "democratic deficit" with the Parliament still remote from the voters. And big problems lie ahead – Migration and Climate Change.

### "5G" networks

I attended a seminar about 5G at which several major phone companies gave presentations for MEPs.

"5G" is the next development of the internet. It is already rolled out in South Korea but only starting in Europe. The technology is still being worked out by European companies and being tried on a small scale, vastly more software and new towers. What is 5G? 1G was analogue ; 2G was digital and early phones ; with 3G, mobile phones and data were added ; 4G means better connectivity ; 5G is the big jump, because it will link up machines in homes and cars and hospitals and farms and factories and cities.

There may be risks with 5G. Cybersecurity (5G is more complex so will be more leaky) ; and also Human Health because some of the radiation can penetrate human skin and damage mitochondria and hormones ; and Data which can influence more than the hundred elections which are known to have been influenced by Cambridge Analytica ; and further ahead, 6G is being thought about. The boss of Huawei (the Chinese company who are accused by the USA of spying) was asked whether any health assessment of 5G had been made by the Chinese government and he replied cagily "We are keen to learn from the West."

At a briefing about US-EU relations, the Impeachment of Trump was discussed and whether he will be re-elected next November. On one day last week, he tweeted 130 times, an extraordinary use of presidential time. Trump "is feral, angry, and on edge." Europe should expect a confrontation about Trade before the election.

Brexit is not over yet. The final two steps before Brexit which are due to happen are: first, the Westminster parliament must ratify the Boris Withdrawal Deal, and then at the end of January the European Parliament will vote and it has a veto. Watch this space.....! Some MEPs are saying that they will veto the Boris Deal because EU citizens are not given rights. Because the Brexit decision was never approved by even half the British voters, in the 2016 referendum (when 37.44% of the registered electorate voted to Leave) or in the recent election. (if you add Boris buddies in the Brexit Party and his previous allies in the DUP, all together they got only 46%). Personally, I have every intention of voting against approval of the Boris Deal and I hope it will be blocked. There should be a referendum.