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*Dear Reader,*

**The European Parliament in November-December 2007**

I think I have discovered a hole in the supposedly reinforced arrangements for stopping uncontrolled entry into this country. The other day I went from Brussels to a conference in Lille, taking the Eurostar. At the Gare du Midi in Brussels you first show your ticket and, if you are going to London, also your passport to Belgian frontier police, and then go to the booth manned by UK immigration officials. You show them your ticket – to Lille. They wave you through. Because you are only going to cross the Franco-Belgian frontier, the British officials have no standing to demand your passport. It is an uncontrolled frontier under the barrier-free Europe agreement signed at Schengen some years ago. The UK is not a member of Schengen; hence our officials can only demand to see passports of anyone going from Brussels or Lille to St.Pancras (whose name is now being perverted into what sounds like “St. Pongcras” by Eurostar staff.)

I asked the UK officials in Brussels what would happen if someone showed them a Lille ticket but then stayed on the train to London. “Ah” he said “We call that the Lille loophole”. I asked him what they were doing to close it. Well, they have done a “scoping” study (to estimate the leakage); they do a lot of “profiling” and they think they have a pretty good idea of what people sneaking through look like. Baloney. What it adds up to is guesswork and a ragged line of officials at St.Pancras, making quick darts to stop a few travellers as hundreds stream through. I note that they always stop backpackers, rarely the tired businesspeople with laptops, never the middle-aged women with trundle suitcase, perhaps the best guarantee of invisibility. I am writing to the Home Office to get ministers’ comments on this “Lille loophole”

This month we welcomed a defector from the LibDems into the Conservative party – Sajjid Karim, a North West MEP. If he gets the support of more than half the NW constituency chairmen in the new selection process he will get a place on our regional list that will guarantee re-election. The deadline for MEPs to inform the party that they want to stand again was 10 December. Mr Karim jumped from the Lib-Dem ship 10 days before this. It was certainly an abrupt, perhaps miraculous, conversion. Not long beforehand Mr Karim was attacking David Cameron and trying, without success, to get an electable position on the Lib-Dem list...

This month the party decided on the pledge that all Euro-candidates will have to sign. I attach a copy of my article on this, written for the [www.conservativehome.com](http://www.conservativehome.com) website.

The most dramatic event of the November session was the speech of the French President, Nicholas Sarkozy who came to raise the curtain on the French Presidency of the EU, in the second half of 2008. One could agree with him about the French “no” vote in their referendum on the Constitution: “When the people say “no” we

cannot say the people are wrong. We must ask why they said “no”... in that “no” there was a cry of anguish, a disappointment that was shared by millions of men and women in Europe who had begun to despair of Europe because they felt it no longer protected them, that it had become indifferent to the problems of their lives, that it was no longer speaking to them”. These thoughts led him away from the British Conservative standpoint that the EU is trying to do too much, and towards the view that the EU should not go for a completely open, free market approach, but stick to a measure of protectionism.

He heralded two future French policies: while they have the Presidency they will push for the “creation of a European defence”, and they want a “committee of wise men to reflect on the future in order that we can debate together the different possible futures of Europe”. And in fact he has got his way. While the British press was concentrating on the disarray of Gordon Brown, the French put the pressure on at the December Brussels summit (this was after the signing of the Treaty in Lisbon) and got agreement to establishing an Independent Reflection Group for the longer term (2020-2030) to identify the key issues and developments which the EU may face and analyse how to address them. It will pay “particular attention to ways of better reaching out to citizens and addressing their expectations.” It will have 9 members, so far not nominated. The trouble with such groups is that they seem unable to recognise that many people want the EU to do less and be inactive in some areas.

There have been some battles on the Charter of Fundamental Rights during these two months. In November Labour MEPs voted to welcome the Charter – despite the fact that its non-application in the UK is one of the “red lines” that the government has fought for. In December we had the solemn signing of the Charter in Strasbourg by the Presidents of the Council, Parliament and Commission. It was the cue for a noisy demonstration by UKIP and its allies. Had this happened in the House of Commons, certain MEPs would have been “named” by the Speaker and removed, possibly forcibly. The European Parliament has no such decisive procedure and the ushers are reluctant to intervene physically to drag protesting MEPs from the chamber. So it was all very rowdy and chaotic and the rules will be reviewed to see if we can exclude members more efficiently when they misbehave in future.

We continue our work on legislation to control climate change. In November we voted to curb airline emissions by including them in the EU emissions trading scheme. The EU’s record so far in curbing carbon dioxide emissions is not good: our target under the Kyoto protocol is an overall 8% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions since 1990. In fact the cumulative growth of EU carbon dioxide emissions stands at 87% since 1990. Without targets, and a structure to enforce them, anything agreed in Bali could go the same way.

Finally, let me reassure you that British Conservative MEPs did raise with Mr Sarkozy the issue of stopping the monthly trek to Strasbourg. Sarkozy said there was “zero flexibility” in the Treaties for such a change. This is a matter subject to the national veto, which we, of course, are in favour of.

I wish you a Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year  
***Caroline Jackson MEP***