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EUROPE MATTERS: MARCH 2010 E-NEWSLETTER

Hello and welcome to the March edition of my e-newsletter. Please feel free to pass this onto family, friends and colleagues.

Thank you for your continued support,

Catherine

Labour MEPs Slash the Cost of Mobile Charges... Again

If any readers are planning a trip abroad this summer, then you will be pleased to hear that mobile phone use throughout Europe has once again got cheaper.

Labour MEPs have been at the forefront of negotiations with the telecommunications industry in order to slash the cost of using your mobile outside of the UK. New rules have been agreed which have given consumers the freedom to control how much they want to spend on their phone whilst abroad in the EU. Consumers will receive a notification from their mobile provider if they are about to exceed the limit that they have agreed to. Before going abroad, you should contact your network provider and confirm the limit that you want.

Although Labour MEPs have continuously fought to slash the cost of mobile phone bills, remember it can still be relatively costly to regularly use your phone out with the UK. Prices may have been reduced dramatically, but it is still considerably more expensive to use your phone in Europe than in the UK. It costs €0.43 per minute to make a phone call, which will continue to reduce to €0.39 by 1st July 2010 and €0.35 by 1 July 2011. To receive a call it costs €0.19 and the price cap will reduce to €0.11 by 1 July 2011. The cost of downloading data will reduce over the next two years, from €1.00 per MB, to €0.50 by 2011. All of these charges apply within EU member states. For the cost of using your phone out with the EU, you will need to refer to your network provider for more details.

Robin Hood Tax

I have put my full support behind the Robin Hood Tax Campaign. The campaign is simply suggesting a 0.05 per cent transaction cost which has the potential to raise billions. A small tax on banks has the power to raise sufficient funds which can be channelled into vital services, including the NHS, education, the fight against child poverty and the scourge of climate change.

I raised my support for the Robin Hood tax in Parliament and I would encourage as many people as possible to sign up to the campaign at <http://robinhoodtax.org.uk/>. This political

decision, however, would be best dealt with at a global level, rather than at a national level. I hope that this idea will be strongly considered by the G20.

Post-Copenhagen

The outcome of the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December 2009 was a disappointment. While many governments were fighting tooth and nail to radically tackle climate change, many governments in the developing world felt that too much was being asked of them. The outcome of Copenhagen came down to a matter of stark differences in the capabilities of the developing and industrial world.

My ambition on the environment is to:

- Reduce emissions;
- Create sustainable 'green jobs';
- Fund developing countries.

Although the outcome of Copenhagen was disappointing, countries such as the United Kingdom and the rest of the EU were able to set out a vision that will shape future negotiations. The EU supported: unconditionally reducing carbon emissions by 20% by 2020 and to reduce it by an extra 10-30% if plans from the USA match Europe. Rest assured Labour in Europe will continue to push for further decisions on targets and will work to achieve them.

SOLVIT: Know Your Rights

All citizens of the EU are entitled to certain rights. The EU Single Market offers consumers and businesses a whole host of opportunities and freedoms, which are unprecedented and the envy of the modern world. However, sometimes the rules which are meant to benefit citizens are ignored.

In 2002 the European Commission set up SOLVIT, a problem solving network, which aims to solve disputes arising from the misapplication of the Single Market. SOLVIT is designed to assist people to live, work and do business across EU borders. SOLVIT can help people overcome practical problems, such as being refused a residency visa, tax problems, or businesses being blocked from entering local markets.

In March, the European Parliament overwhelmingly voted to support crucial amendments to SOLVIT, which will help to improve the functioning of the EU's single market. MEPs have voted for the Commission and Member States to do more to promote SOLVIT and to ensure that SOLVIT centres are sufficiently staffed. I was the lead MEP working on SOLVIT in the Socialist Group. Citizens need to know what their rights are and know who to contact when things go wrong. For more information on SOLVIT, you can visit <http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/> or phone the SOLVIT UK Centre on 0207 7215 2800.

Freedom of Movement

I have lost count of the number of constituents that have contacted me regarding problems they have encountered when moving to another EU country. It is vital that all EU citizens know their rights and what to do when they are violated.

Many British citizens have been the victims of 'land grab laws' - particularly in Spain. This is when homes are demolished – without the owner's permission - due to disputes over local planning laws, and often for last minute decisions to change rural areas into urban areas. Labour MEPs have called for the Spanish government to do more to find a resolution and to protect the thousands of EU citizens that invest in a property in Spain. One of my Labour colleagues in Brussels has raised this point and has called on the Spanish government to be more accountable.

My advice to all constituents is to do some thorough research before moving.

A few hints and tips:

- Have you sought clarity on the provision of medical services, social security benefits and insurances in the country you are moving to? What are you legally entitled to?
- Have you informed the Department of Work and Pensions that you are moving?
- Before opening a bank account or purchasing any financial products, have you checked to make sure there is an English-speaking part of the branch or call centre?
- Are you familiar with the local laws and customs?
- Do you know where to turn to for legal advice if you are victim of a crime or are accused of an offence?

Moving to another EU country does not need to be as daunting as it seems. I would strongly advise all constituents who are thinking of moving, to contact the International Department of Work and Pensions for advice - <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/international/>

Additionally, the European Commission provide a free of charge Europe Direct service, which is operated by a team of legal consultants. Direct are able to give accurate, up to date advice on EU policies, laws and citizens' rights - http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm

Get in Touch!

If you would like more information on my work in Parliament, please contact me. Remember you can continue to follow me on Facebook and Twitter.

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