



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 20 November 2014

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
21st Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

*Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

David Coburn MEP

Ian Duncan MEP

Ian Hudghton MEP

David Martin MEP

Catherine Stihler MEP

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Thursday 20 November 2014

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:40]

European Parliament (New Session)

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Good morning and welcome to the 21st meeting in 2014 of the European and External Relations Committee. I make the usual request for mobile phones to be switched off. I apologise for keeping people waiting, but we had a wee technical difficulty.

The first agenda item is a discussion on the new session of the European Parliament. I am delighted to have with us five of our six MEPs. By videoconference, we have our Brussels contingent. I welcome Dr Ian Duncan—he is on the other side of the table this time—Ian Hudghton and David Martin. With us in the room we have Catherine Stihler and David Coburn, whom I also welcome. Alyn Smith has sent his apologies, but he has provided written evidence, which members have in their papers.

I thank all our witnesses for their written evidence. We have a tight timescale this morning and our witnesses have to be in different places later, so we will move fairly quickly. On etiquette, the videoconference has a slight time lag, so I ask everybody to allow a few seconds for transmission before they respond to comments. That would be helpful.

We will go straight to questions, although my opening question will allow each of our witnesses to give an overview of their current work. I will start with the Brussels contingent, because that will allow us to get used to the time lag. Just to put him on the spot, I will start with Dr Duncan. I am delighted to do so and I congratulate him on his election.

We are very keen to know from all our MEPs what is happening in Brussels now that we have had the election and the new college of commissioners has been elected. What is the political impetus? Personally, what work are you involved in on committees and what pieces of work are coming over the horizon that will have an impact on Scotland? I ask Dr Duncan to answer that first. We have two Ians and two Davids this morning, so I will try to stick to surnames for the men.

Ian Duncan MEP: Madam president, it is a pleasure to see you from this side. The last time that I did this, I would have been the nervous person at the back trying to make sure that the link actually worked, so it is nice to be sitting here watching everything unfold.

It is an exciting time to be in Brussels right now. We are still in the early stages of the new session so, in truth, things are still settling down. The Commission has just come into office, so we are broadly working through legacy issues or hold-overs from the previous mandate. Around 15 December, we expect to get the Commission's work programme, which will give us a strong indication of exactly where the issues will be in the next five years and when they will unfold. I know that your team will be on top of that.

I sit on three committees. I am a full member of ENVI, which is the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, and I am a substitute member of the Committee on Fisheries, alongside Ian Hudghton, and ITRE, which is the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy.

As I said, there are some legacy issues. On fisheries, the priority for me right now is the landing obligation, which is a serious concern. The committee will be aware that the discard ban comes in for the first fisheries—the pelagic fisheries—on 1 January 2015. That is important. The landing obligation will give the discard ban its legal underpinning, but that underpinning is not there because the proposals will not be ready for 1 January. There will be no enforceability until the obligation is signed off, which will happen some time in the middle of next year. Therefore, for the first part of the year, Scottish fishermen will be without the certainty of the law, which is a bad thing. There is other information on fisheries in the note that I sent the committee, so I will not go into that in any detail.

However, I will touch on another aspect on which I will be leading. I will be part of the European Parliament's delegation to the United Nations climate change conference in Lima. I know that Scotland has quite a tale to tell on its commitment to climate change and energy issues. I would be interested to hear from the committee what you would like me to take to the conference, at which I will sit with the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government. I will ensure that those views are heard and incorporated, and I will report back. The conference will be an important first step and will give us a sense of where the commitments to climate change are heading and of our ability to secure the 2°C reduction in overall global temperature.

I will leave it there. There is, of course, more information in my note to the committee. I am happy to take questions on any aspect of that.

09:45

The Convener: I will get an overview from all the witnesses before we ask questions. Mr Martin, are you ready to go next?

David Martin MEP: Good morning. As Ian Duncan rightly says, we do not yet have the political guidelines or the political work programme for the European Commission. However, we have clear priorities that we want to be included in the work programme. First, we want the focus of the new Commission to be on jobs, growth and investment, because we think that the crucial issue for Europe is getting the whole continent out of austerity. We therefore want to ensure that the youth guarantee scheme that already exists is properly implemented and that the funding is properly spent.

This has not yet been formally announced, but we know that, as a result of pressure from my group when Mr Juncker came before us for endorsement, the Commission is going to announce a €300 billion investment in the European economy. More recently, we have heard that the Commission is going to include something in its work programme on tackling tax avoidance, which is perhaps no coincidence given the debate about tax in Luxembourg. It is interesting that that announcement should come at this stage. Beyond that, we can all guess what will be in the Commission's work programme, but we do not have it yet.

I do most of my work on three committees: the Committee on International Trade, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Human Rights. I want to focus particularly on the trade committee because, as in the Parliament's previous session, it will again be one of the busiest committees. Towards the end of the previous session, we completed the free trade agreements with South Korea, central America and Colombia and Peru. We already have the outcomes of the first year or so of implementation of the South Korea free trade agreement, and the news there is good for Scotland and the European Union. EU exports to South Korea went up far more than imports from South Korea as a whole. In particular, Scottish whisky did rather well out of the change in the tax regime and the protection that was given as a result of the free trade agreement, which is good news for Scotland.

The Commission has completed free trade agreements with Singapore and Canada, which the European Parliament will have to ratify some time in the next year to 18 months. It takes a long time because the agreements have to go through what is called legal scrubbing to ensure that the texts are legally watertight and, unfortunately, they have to be translated into 24 languages. The agreements with Canada and Singapore are also

good news for us, because the Commission was robust in insisting on including geographical indicators in them. As members will know, that is important for a number of Scottish products. Those markets are good not just for whisky but for other Scottish products such as textiles. It is therefore encouraging that the FTAs have been completed, although we have to wait for the ratification process.

I will not go into any detail, but we have on-going FTAs with Japan, Vietnam, Ecuador, Malaysia and India, and investment agreements are being negotiated with Myanmar and China. However, the big one that people will probably know most about is the so-called TTIP—the transatlantic trade and investment partnership—with the United States, which has been controversial. Others might say that I am wrong on this but, although there is nothing on paper as we are only negotiating and there is no final text, from having spoken to negotiators on both sides, I personally do not believe that there is any threat to the health service as a result of the TTIP. There has been a lot of talk in the press that it will damage our healthcare, but I do not believe that that will be the case.

There is worry about something called investor-state dispute settlement, which is a mechanism that allows big corporations to sue behind closed doors if they think that their investments have been unduly discriminated against. My group in the Parliament is absolutely against the idea that investor-state dispute settlement should be in any trade agreement. On the whole, if we can get a good TTIP, we believe that it would be good for the Scottish economy and the European economy as a whole.

There are a number of other issues that are not particularly germane to Scotland but which are important. We are trying to update the anti-torture regulation and the dual-use regulation.

We have a very important file on conflict minerals—a lot of Scottish non-governmental organisations have been engaged in that work, which is about trying to manage the four minerals that are most commonly associated with conflict around the world.

We are extending the generalised scheme of preferences plus—GSP+—which is a scheme of preferential access to the European market. The Philippines is next in line and of course we have been trying to help and show solidarity with Ukraine by giving it trade preferences in light of the problems that it is facing with its big neighbour.

There are many other issues, but I will stop there.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Mr Hudghton is next.

Ian Hudghton MEP: Thank you for this opportunity, convener—and congratulations on managing to get five out of the six Scotland MEPs into one meeting. That is a record so far for this Parliament. I certainly look forward to future relations with MSPs.

You have heard a pretty good overview of many of the issues that I mentioned in my paper. I confirm that I am still a full member of the Committee on Fisheries—I have been a member of that committee for the whole time that I have been in the European Parliament. Like Ian Duncan, I have concerns, now that we have finished with the structure and the so-called reform of the common fisheries policy, about the test of the policy's suitability for purpose in its implementation. There is a looming controversy, to say the least, about how the discard ban is to be implemented.

In the Committee on Fisheries, there appears to be a growing view, which Ian Duncan and I share, that instead of having an omnibus regulation—as the Commission and indeed the Council want—that tries to wrap up and foresee a whole range of what are now called legal tidy-up measures, we should apply the discard ban, or landing obligation, on a fishery-by-fishery basis, when it is due to be implemented. We should therefore be focusing very directly on the very different nature of the different fisheries that will be involved.

We are starting with the pelagic fisheries discard ban—which is due to be implemented from 1 January 2015—because, relatively speaking, the pelagic fisheries are clean fisheries: they are not the biggest problem in relation to unwanted catches and therefore discards. My attitude in our current discussion in the Committee on Fisheries and in the European Parliament is that we should focus on those parts of the discard ban that come in on 1 January and look more carefully at the complicated and difficult nature of how to apply the ban to the mixed white-fish fishery, which is also very important in Scotland.

On the TTIP, we have all had a significant mailbag from constituents expressing concerns of all kinds about the proposal—you may have had a similar experience. That has not really been helped by what we might call the secretive nature of the negotiations so far. It is only due to pressure from MEPs and others that the negotiating mandate has been published recently, and there is now some talk of further documentation being made available to all MEPs rather than just a select number who are involved in a particular committee. A bit more openness would be very helpful.

There are those such as the UK Government who say, "Don't worry, there is nothing in here to upset a public health service," but if that is the

case, I would prefer it to be written in as a guarantee rather than given as a verbal assurance. All kinds of European agreements are based on so much compromise that they can often be interpreted somewhat flexibly, to say the least. If there is no intention to affect public services through the agreement, let us make sure that the wording of the agreement is categorical and clear about that.

The new Commission has just taken office and had its first meetings, and it is already facing a motion of censure in the European Parliament. The motion, which I think might be considered next week, is partly based on the Luxembourg tax situation that has been the cause of some further attacks on President Juncker. I do not think that the censure motion will succeed.

President Juncker made it very clear at our plenary in Brussels last week that there is to be a Commission investigation into the allegations in Luxembourg and in other places, that he personally will have nothing to do with the inquiry and that the commissioners concerned will be fully independent in conducting it. I therefore think that a censure motion in the Commission is somewhat premature at this stage, although of course the Commission is on trial anyway, given that many of us had reservations about aspects concerning individuals as well as the make-up of the team.

The Commission has an interesting new structure: rather than have 27 different sets of responsibilities, President Juncker has a group of five vice-presidents and has given them broader portfolios, with other commissioners then supporting the vice-presidents in supposedly logical policy groupings. I think that that is worth a try, but it remains to be seen whether it will be more successful than the past colleges of commissioners.

The Convener: Thank you. Bringing us back to Scotland now, we have Mr Coburn.

David Coburn MEP: Thank you for inviting me. It is a great pleasure to be here. As you all know, the UK Independence Party won the European election and I was elected from Scotland, which shows that just as many folk in Scotland as in England are vexed by the European Union. A recent poll said that about 35 per cent are in favour and 45 per cent are against—that is only a small margin, and as we get more exposure in the press in Scotland the gap will no doubt narrow.

I am on the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries—the PECH committee—and the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy. I will not go on about the problems with landing obligations, which have already been discussed. The Committee on Fisheries does not seem to understand the problems of Scottish fishermen

bobbing about on the North Sea. The boats cannot utilise the laws that Brussels creates, which are probably unenforceable and make it difficult for Scottish fishermen to earn a living.

As for energy, as you will all know, UKIP is opposed to having ugly German windmills all over our countryside. They destroy our tourist trade and do not provide any energy; they just push up power prices for Scottish pensioners, which is not very good. When the wind does not blow, we will still need some sort of backup—that is, nuclear power.

Another problem that I see coming up is, of course, the TTIP. I disagree with my colleagues about that, because I think that the TTIP will be a problem for the national health service. I do not think that the negotiations with America on the TTIP should be conducted by the European Union; I think that they should be conducted by the United Kingdom Government.

The European Commission continues to be unelected. Basically, we are living under an unelected oligarchy in Brussels that is simply appointed and has some very dubious and odd characters. As the committee has heard, Herr Juncker is now under investigation over alleged dodgy dealings when he was Prime Minister of Luxembourg. It remains to be seen what that will bring out, but there have been calls for his resignation.

As the committee will know, after 19 years the European Union budget has still not been signed off, which does not inspire confidence. I do not think that the EU is a very good organisation or that we should be a member of it. At an EU meeting, I managed to get Herr Juncker to agree with his colleague, the former President Barroso, that it would be five years before an independent Scotland—if such a thing existed—could enter the EU. He also agreed that it would have to accept the euro, which has bankrupted southern Europe—Greece, Spain and Portugal—and now France. That is obviously very worrying for Scots and one of the reasons why I think so many of them voted against separation.

I will continue to fight for the cause of Scotland in the European Union. I will make sure that as little interference as possible is inflicted on our people, and I will point out to business, the fishing and agriculture industries and Scots in general the problems that they face in being ruled by Brussels. In addition, I am very worried about what will happen to the financial services industry in Edinburgh and London. Frankfurt is extremely keen to have that industry, and the EU will do everything that it can to ensure that that happens.

We should be very worried about the EU in general because, quite frankly, most of our laws

are passed there. You good ladies and gentlemen are obtaining money by deception, and so is Westminster, because all the decisions are being made in Brussels.

I think that I have made clear my position on the EU, and I hope that you all see the light and join UKIP.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

10:00

Catherine Stihler MEP: My colleagues have already outlined our concerns and our priorities as far as jobs, investment and growth are concerned. The youth guarantee scheme, which David Martin mentioned, is exceedingly important. Of course, we do not yet know what the Commission's work programme will be. We have an idea of what will be in the jobs and growth package, but we will be able to have a fuller discussion once we have the work programme in front of us.

You asked us to talk about the work that we are doing. I am vice-chair of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, or IMCO. It has a new remit on the digital single market, which is very important to economic growth and to our citizens. There are too many barriers in the digital single market. Two commissioners—Commissioner Ansip and Commissioner Oettinger—now have responsibility for digital matters. We are very lucky to have Commissioner Ansip, the former Prime Minister of Estonia, who has said that he knows in his bones what needs to happen to make digital a reality across the EU.

It is an extremely exciting time. Just yesterday, Sir Tim Berners-Lee came to talk to IMCO; non-member MEPs were allowed to come along, too. It was inspiring to talk to the founder of the worldwide web about the importance of net neutrality and having an open web. When someone such as Sir Tim comes to tell us about the importance of those ideals at Europe level, we must fight for them.

On a practical day-to-day level in IMCO, I am the rapporteur on intellectual property rights, and I was responsible for the budget for 2015. I am also the standing rapporteur on construction products. I have continued the work that I did in my previous mandate into my current mandate. I am also rapporteur on gas appliances. The committee might not think that that is a key interest of people in Scotland, but it is important that when people buy a gas fire or gas cooker they can make sure that it is safe. I also play a role in relation to energy efficiency.

I am a substitute member on the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee; I disagree with Mr

Coburn about the importance of the EU to financial services. I have the privilege of being the standing rapporteur on the solvency II directive. Seeing that through is vital to our insurance industry. In addition, I am the shadow rapporteur on insurance mediation. I am also on the European Economic Area's European Free Trade Association delegation, and I am a substitute on the American delegation.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I could see Willie Coffey getting very excited about the digital stuff, and my fellow girl geek, Clare Adamson, getting very excited about the worldwide web and the scientist you mentioned. I have no doubt that they will have questions for you on that.

Jamie McGrigor will kick off with questions on the written evidence.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I would like to thank all the MEPs for their submissions.

Dr Duncan—I should probably call him Ian—referred to the loss of the role of the chief scientific adviser to the Commission, which had been held by Professor Anne Glover from Arbroath, and he expressed the concern that that was a retrograde step. Could you comment further on that? Is there any chance that that role will be replaced?

Ian Duncan: Well, Jamie—if I may call you Jamie—I think that there is a serious problem unfolding here. Anne Glover is a notable scientist. She was Scotland's chief scientist and she took that role and applied it to the whole of Europe. Her work and contribution have been significant.

President Juncker came to my group and made a promise when asked a question about continuation of the role. He was asked whether he could see a role for a chief scientist to offer advice, and he said that he could. We took that as an indication that, although Professor Glover may demit office, the role itself would continue, but that now seems not to be the case. Our concern is that it seems to have been at the prompting—I shall say no more than that—of certain green groups who disliked her advice on genetically modified organisms, among other issues.

I have serious concerns. We are often told, in respect of fisheries and other matters, how important it is to have science at the heart of the debate, so that move sends exactly the wrong message. Science should be at the heart of the debate, but to dismiss the scientist who provides it sends the message that we do not need it, which is wrong. President Juncker has been asked to clarify his position again, and he seems to be a little bit more equivocal now than he was at the beginning, when it seemed to be clear that the role would end. I hope that he will think again: I believe

that he should think again. I would like to think that Professor Glover's legacy will be a continuation of that role, because it is a valuable role that brings science closer to the decision-making process.

Jamie McGrigor: I turn to fisheries, on which I know that both Ian Duncan and Ian Hudghton are experts. You talked about the discard ban, and I am aware that the pelagic fishermen, who will be hit first when the ban comes in on 1 January 2015, are concerned about the compliance rules and about there being a level playing field for the Scottish fleet and fleets from non-EU countries that fish in the same waters for pelagic species. Could you comment on that? There is a feeling, certainly among some people in our fleet, that there will be some unfairness.

Ian Hudghton: I have had that fear put to me in no uncertain terms—not least when I was in Shetland in the run-up to the European elections. As I understand it, the UK Government has expressed that it is satisfied that the regulation for the pelagic fishery was put together on a regional basis—that is, with input from the relevant member states. Whether there has been enough consultation within the member states is a matter on which I am not absolutely clear, but I understand that there cannot and will not be any discrimination or inequality in enforcement when fishers are fishing for the same stock in the same waters, and that is as it should be.

Jamie McGrigor: I understand that some boats will have cameras and others will not. That is what the concerns are about.

Ian Duncan: Ian Hudghton and I are both on exactly the same page: we need a regionalised policy for the management of fisheries. We must ensure that all those who are participating in and prosecuting the fishery, no matter where they come from, are bound by the same standards. If they are not, we will be at an economic disadvantage, and it is tough enough to be a fisherman these days without having the burden of competing against others with one hand tied behind your back.

The Commission continues to talk about the importance of regionalisation, but I have yet to see it demonstrate any meaningful commitment to it. That is something that I am sure Ian Hudghton, David Coburn and I will all be pushing for, because we must ensure that the Commission hears the fishermen of Scotland and responds to their concerns.

Jamie McGrigor: You talked about regionalisation and the wish to have subsidiarity, but it appears to be that the Commission wants a complete ban on drift nets, although there are three drift-net fisheries in the UK that are considered to be completely sustainable. Is not

that an example of a broad-brush approach that has not been clearly thought through?

David Coburn: Yes. We agree whole-heartedly.

Ian Hudghton: Absolutely. That is a broad-brush approach. The Commission has proposed a complete ban on all drift-net fisheries, but that has to get through both Council and Parliament. From the two exchanges on that subject that we have had in the Committee on Fisheries, it looks to be extremely unlikely that the Parliament will support the Commission on that blanket ban, because of regionalisation.

We hear people here talk about the key features of CFP reform; in many folk's minds a discard ban is one of them. In my mind, one of the most important things about the CFP so-called reform is the limited extent to which it makes regionalisation or decentralisation an option. The drift-net ban is clearly an issue that ought to be tackled regionally on a fishery-by-fishery basis, because in some areas drift netting is being carried out on a relatively small scale, relatively inshore and relatively harmlessly in environmental terms. Why should people who carry out drift netting like that be penalised by a blanket regulation that goes against the new CFP's principle of regionalisation?

Ian Duncan: I am struck by the proposal, which fails on two counts: on regionalisation, as Ian Hudghton said, and on the science. We cannot have a fishery accorded the highest standard of sustainable fishing by the Marine Stewardship Council and then say that fishing must be halted there. That is nonsense on stilts and it brings the Commission into disrepute. I have recommended—Ian Hudghton has, as well—that we send the proposal back.

There is a need for a ban on certain types of drift netting, but those types are primarily in the Mediterranean, not in the United Kingdom. The idea of a one-net-fits-all policy is wrong; I thought that the Commission had agreed that it would move away from that. The proposal is a legacy of the previous period. Perhaps as we go forward this sort of approach will stop; frankly, it should.

David Coburn: I agree with my colleagues, with whom I will be fighting on the same side. We all agree on this. It is disgraceful, but then again, if we leave the European Union we will get a 200-mile limit back, which will be preferable for all. I think that decisions about fishing should be made in this country, but since we are still in the EU we must fight together to ensure that Scottish fishermen get the best possible deal.

The Convener: Mr McGrigor, do you still have some questions?

Jamie McGrigor: I have some other questions. May I continue or do you want to allow others in?

The Convener: Are the questions on a different theme?

Jamie McGrigor: They are on a particular theme—a small one.

The Convener: Go for it.

Jamie McGrigor: I agree with Mr Coburn about the dangers to the financial service sectors in London and Edinburgh, which are obviously very important with the invisible earnings and everything else that comes with them. You said that you will work to ensure that they do not disappear to Frankfurt. How do you intend to do that?

David Coburn: That is a very good question. Quite frankly, the best way of doing it is to leave the EU. I hate to harp on at the same theme, but there you are.

Jamie McGrigor: How do you intend to do that while we are still in the EU? You are an MEP, serving the people.

David Coburn: The best way is to point out the inconsistencies, point out what the Commission is up to and point out what the EU in general is trying to do. The more light that we shine under their rock and bring those things to the attention of the British Government the better, because I am afraid that David Cameron and his merry men do not seem to be as vexed about them as we are.

It is not just a matter of invisible earnings; a great deal of employment in Edinburgh rests on this. The last thing we want is to lose more jobs in Scotland. We need jobs in Scotland more than anything else, so that would be a tremendously bad result. We must defend our position; we do not want everything going to Frankfurt, and they want everything Euro-denominated. That is another major problem and another major reason why we must leave the EU. Jobs will not disappear only from here to Frankfurt; they will also disappear to the far east, where there are fewer regulations.

Jamie McGrigor: Could I come back in later on?

The Convener: Okay.

Catherine Stihler has been working in some detail on this issue. Would you like to contribute?

Catherine Stihler: I have a completely different perspective from Mr Coburn. On financial services, the rules that we make apply across the EU and we need a strong voice to make our case. I do not see David Coburn coming along to the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee to make the case for Scottish financial services, which employ 100,000 people.

That said, we have to ensure that our financial services regulation has a Scottish voice, and I work very closely with Scottish Financial Enterprise and others in that respect. It would be a disaster for Scotland and the rest of the UK—especially financial services—if we were to go down the route that Mr Coburn is proposing. I suggest that he speak in more depth to financial services institutions about the consequences of his proposals.

10:15

David Coburn: I point out that I worked in the City for many years so I think that I know more about it—

The Convener: I am sorry, Mr Coburn, but can you speak through the chair, please?

David Coburn: I am sorry, madam chairman. I am just pointing out that I worked for many years in the City of London, so, with respect, I think that I know an awful lot more about the issue than Catherine Stihler.

Catherine Stihler: That is what makes your proposals all the more surprising.

David Coburn: Well, I—

The Convener: I am sorry, but we have to move on. Mr Coffey has a different line of questioning.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Good morning, colleagues. It is nice to see you.

According to the European Commission, 90 per cent of jobs in Europe will by 2020 require some form of digital skills, and I was pleased to see the connected digital single market being one of Mr Juncker's 10 priorities. I would be grateful to hear the panel's views on that. Two aspects are of specific interest to me: the first is the progress on making digital connectivity and broadband infrastructure more competitive, and the second is the digital skills agenda. In that respect, a European Commission report published in only the past few weeks has highlighted that digital competency, particularly among youngsters, needs to be improved.

First of all, in that case, do you support the aims and objectives of the digital single market, and do you think that it contributes to jobs, growth and competitiveness? Secondly, how can we improve our youngsters' skills and competencies, particularly in this digital age?

Catherine Stihler: I think that you are absolutely right. It was really good to take part in the coderdojo a few weeks ago, where young people came to the European Parliament to show us how to code. Perhaps you could do something

similar in the Scottish Parliament—you might already have done so—because it was a really good event. A 12-year-old boy from Ireland showed me how to program and, interestingly, the program that he and I worked on was the one that my eight-year-old son had suggested when we talked about these things. I think that skills are absolutely paramount.

The digital single market is the real economy, but let me give the committee a statistic. Although 47 per cent of EU consumers have purchased online from a seller that is based in their home country, only 15 per cent have purchased from another EU country. There are, therefore, trust, mindset and inclusiveness issues to address.

The key issues and challenges for the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection are to conclude the negotiations on the European data protection rules, to make the on-going reform of EU telecommunications rules more ambitious, to modernise copyright rules in the light of the digital revolution and modernising and to simplify consumer rules for online and digital purchases. Neelie Kroes, who has just finished her term as digital commissioner, has joked about the fact that it has taken two men to replace one woman. That said, Commissioner Ansip and Commissioner Oettinger will do a tremendous job to ensure that we get this right over the next five years, given how pivotal it is to our economy.

David Coburn: My shipping business is based entirely on the internet, so I am very aware of the problem. I believe that we must have a better education system, and I regret the fact that we do not have final grammar schools such as Allan Glen's school any more. We need to get to grips with ensuring that we have good schools teaching good technology, because it is extremely important. This is the future; it is being done in the far east and if we do not do it here we will be left behind. The future is the internet.

The other big problem is, as Catherine Stihler suggested, payments and cross-border fraud, which is certainly a major problem for my business. The European Union could help out here, but it is an extremely important issue that we must get to grips with.

The Convener: Thank you. Do any of our Brussels contingent want to add anything?

David Martin: I mentioned at the start that the Commission is likely to announce a €300 billion investment package, so one half of what Mr Coffey asked for in terms of structural investment is likely to come out of that funding if we get the programme right. Therefore, there is a chance that we can roll out more broadband connectivity as a result of that investment package.

This is slightly different from what I was asked about earlier, but one of the TTIP's aims is to improve telecommunications and digital connections between the US and the EU. People have mentioned the problem of buying consumer goods in Europe, but trying to do it transatlantically is even more difficult. To take a slightly frivolous example, if you log on to the US iTunes instead of the UK one, you will know that there are songs that you cannot buy in the US that you can buy here. If we get the TTIP right, that kind of situation will cease and it will be like one single market. That will improve opportunities for European Union consumers, rural businesses and so on, as they will be able to have digital access to the US market and to ship into it in a much simpler way than they can at present.

The Convener: Thank you for that. Mr Coffey has a comment.

Willie Coffey: I thank the European Parliament members for their contributions. I just want to clarify something with Mr Coburn. We might express different political views, but does he agree that we should support the concept of a digital single market in Europe because it will support growth and competitiveness?

David Coburn: We need to have a single market in that area and we all need to co-operate on it, but it does not need to be done through the European Union. The EU is just using our money to do something that we could do ourselves. The way in which the European Union does it is extremely complicated—unnecessarily so. I am sure that a better agreement could be negotiated by all the nations in Europe without having to go through the European Union. However, as we are here, we might as well make the best of what we have.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. I want to follow up a theme that we have touched on a bit this morning. Mr Martin and Ms Stihler said that the youth guarantee was of particular interest. Economic growth is key, but I am also concerned about women and gender segregation in the workforce. The issue applies not only in the digital economy that we have been talking about but in other science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—areas. I did a little bit of teasing of the Italian ambassador when he was here about the priorities of the Italian presidency because the gender make-up of the new Commission was a little disappointing. How will you look at women in the workplaces in your areas in the coming years?

David Coburn: UKIP believes that all men and women are equal and we do not believe in special pleading. In our party, you get on on merit. As a matter of fact, we have more women than men

standing in senior positions, which is pretty good. That has not been done through special pleading, segregation or anything of that sort. I think that everyone should have an equal shot at the cup. Obviously, I deplore any sort of discrimination, but I am not a mad—I might be said to be a feminist in as much as I want women to get on in the world. I do not think that we should have discrimination, however.

Catherine Stihler: I thank Clare Adamson for her question. Many of us pushed the Commission hard on that because, at the beginning, we thought that there might be only three female commissioners, which would have been completely unacceptable. I would like to have parity, but the number that we now have was achieved by many of us lobbying and pushing for it and the work of MEPs to put the issue on the agenda should be recognised.

A female Spanish colleague from my political group is chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Gender mainstreaming is about ensuring that all policies are about inclusivity. Gender is such an important issue in the debates that we are having about gender representation on boards, the on-going issues regarding maternity rights or the many other issues that we deal with at a European level.

Compared with when my baby was 11 weeks old, when I could take my son into Parliament to go and vote and that was viewed positively—as you know, MEPs are not replaced for voting, which really needs to be changed—there is great recognition of such issues in the Parliament, but we still have a fight on our hands. It took our pushing the Commission and Mr Juncker to have the gender issue acknowledged, so we will have to address it again in five years' time to ensure that that no longer happens.

The Convener: What do our men in Brussels think? Ian Duncan is next.

Ian Duncan: We are not all men in Brussels.

Catherine Stihler: It looks like it from here.

Ian Duncan: I would note two things. First, here in Brussels, we often forget that the European Union has a wide cultural base—that there are a number of challenges, and we are not all at the same place. It is a matter of ensuring that what happens in the European Union can serve as a beacon for others, not just when it comes to the gender mix, but also in other areas where there is prejudice—based on age discrimination, ethnicity, sexuality or whatever it happens to be.

There is a role to be played here, and that message can perhaps be sent from Brussels in such a way that it can be heard in very different ways in other parts of the European Union.

Secondly, President Juncker made an interesting point when he was soliciting nominees from member states for his Commission. He stated that if countries nominated a woman, he could guarantee that she would get a more senior position, which was an interesting offer. Oddly enough, it was not taken up by many of the member states that subsequently nominated, but it was an interesting declaration. It will be interesting to see how well we move towards broader parity in these various areas, whether that is driven here in the European Union or elsewhere.

Clare Adamson: One of the things that we really regret about the removal of Anne Glover's post is that she was such a great role model for women across Europe.

The Convener: Indeed.

I am very conscious of the time. I wonder whether our MEPs perhaps have an extra few minutes that they do not mind adding on.

David Coburn: We would be delighted.

The Convener: Excellent.

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I wish to pick up on the issue of TTIP. David Martin will know that there is widespread concern among trade unions in the UK, including in Scotland, and in many other countries. The committee will be doing quite a bit of work on TTIP over the next month or two, with evidence sessions.

A couple of points arise. The argument that was put in relation to health during the referendum campaign was that, if Scotland was an independent state, it would be treated as such. The fact that there was a no vote means that it is part of the UK state. Therefore, if health services are privatised in England but not in Scotland, large corporations could—it is suggested under the agreement—sue the UK Government, or the Scottish Government if we do not put the health services that are privatised in England out in Scotland. As I understand it, the health secretary will be taking legal advice on the matter, which we hope to be able to get in the coming weeks.

The Italian ambassador gave evidence to the committee a number of weeks ago and was specific about the point that services that are in the public sector will not be part of the agreement. That is the issue in relation to health, anyway.

The very idea that large American corporations could basically sue the Scottish Government or the UK Government to try and get contracts and work does not seem to be acceptable.

Returning to the point that Ian Hudghton made, we need to have some transparency around the matter. Regardless of whether the concerns are legitimate or whether there has been a feeding

frenzy, the fact is that there is a growing concern, not just throughout Scotland but throughout the UK, about the implications of TTIP.

The Convener: Mr Martin, I will let you come back on this issue; then I will let you come in, Mr Coburn.

One of the real concerns on which we have all been lobbied—hence the committee is pursuing it—involves the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism. I see from my notes that Mr Martin mentioned earlier that the ISDS was a matter of concern. In answering Alex Rowley's question, perhaps he could answer that point, too.

10:30

David Martin: I want to speak for my group on this. I am the socialist group co-ordinator, so I lead for the whole of the socialist group on trade policy. We take the view that a good TTIP will be good for jobs and growth in the EU. We are sceptical about some of the Commission's figures about the percentage of growth that it will create or the specific number of jobs, because we do not believe that economic modelling can be done to that extent. However, the direction of travel of a good TTIP would be towards creating more jobs and stimulating growth.

That said, we have three red lines, and Alex Rowley touched on at least two of them. First, we will not support any TTIP that damages public services. Secondly, TTIP should not contain investor-state dispute settlement. Thirdly, and equally importantly, it should not lower consumer standards—you have probably heard about the debate that it might let chlorinated chicken or GMOs into the EU.

I will deal with each of those points as briefly as I can. On public services, it should be made very clear that unless a service is privatised voluntarily—with the emphasis on "voluntarily"—it does not come within the remit of trade agreements. Privatisation cannot be forced. The current argument between Scotland and England is that England has already privatised part of its health service and, if TTIP existed, it could not be taken back into public control. The issue is not that you could be forced to privatise a service if it is not already in the private sector; it is what is called the ratchet clause, which means that you could not bring it back into the public sector.

That is not my interpretation. My interpretation is that if you open up a service and do not exclude it from a trade agreement, you open it up to competition within the domestic market and to competition from whoever you have signed your trade deal with. In this case, it would be America.

The other thing to emphasise is the fact that, so far, the EU has never signed a free trade agreement that does not exempt public services, specifically health. States also have an opt-out, and the UK has never not exercised its right to an opt-out over health services when the EU has signed a free trade agreement. The likelihood of public services being included in the TTIP is therefore slim.

The bigger problem that you and Alex Rowley alluded to, convener, concerns investor-state dispute. Investor-state dispute settlements have been abused in the past. They are not a new thing; there are something like 1,400 ISDSs around at the moment, many of them—illegally since the Lisbon treaty came into force—internal EU agreements.

One of the famous cases that is often cited as an argument against ISDS is the fact that Swedish companies are suing the German Government because Germany is ending its nuclear programme and they are saying that they are entitled to significant compensation because, by ending the programme, Germany has denied them the right to make money. Another famous case is the Philip Morris case against Australia on plain packaging for cigarettes.

It is not right that companies should be able to sue for changes in public policy, nor is it right that they should be able to sue for future profit that they think they will lose because of a policy change. However, we have to find a balance, and if assets are expropriated, it is right that companies are protected. You might think that that does not happen very often in the modern world, but think back to less than a year ago when Argentina took over Spanish assets in Argentina and, until ISDS was exercised, it did not pay any compensation for that. We are trying to find a way in which protection for physical assets can be guaranteed but not for the other things for which ISDS has been used.

A further complication—I am sorry, but this is a bit more complicated than you might have expected—is that, for example, nine of the 28 EU member states have ISD agreements with the US. Frankly, those agreements are all badly and loosely worded at the moment, which opens them up to attack. The deal that the EU is preparing to do will be much tighter. How can I say that? Because we have done an ISD deal with Canada that is much more restrictive around what can be sued for.

All that said, I repeat that we do not believe that investor-state disputes should be in the agreements. We think that there is another mechanism for dealing with the issue, which is state-to-state settlement rather than allowing individual private companies to sue.

The points to emphasise are that first, this is not new—it has been going on for a long time; and that, secondly, the EU model is better than any model that any of the existing member states has at present. Some people might say, “Well, you would say that,” but I actually believe that. The EU model is better because we have learned from history and we have learned from the mistakes that have been made in existing investor-state disputes.

Alex Rowley made a point about transparency—he is absolutely right. It was very difficult initially to get good information. That has changed quite dramatically. We now have the negotiating mandate; we now know what the Commission is negotiating on. From the very beginning, after every round of negotiations, the Commission has been coming and reporting to the members of the Committee on International Trade. That has been good for us but rather frustrating because it has been done behind closed doors, in confidence, and we are not meant to go out and talk about the specifics of what we are being told.

As Ian Hudghton rightly said at the beginning, now the agreement and the documentation are going to be open to all MEPs. I do not think that we are there yet as regards transparency, but we are moving in the right direction. Alex Rowley is right to say that this is an important issue. Collectively, I think that we believe that when we get to the end of the process, we should have an informed public that knows what is at stake in relation to TTIP and understands the content of it so that we can have an informed discussion.

It is important to emphasise that the European Parliament will have a vote on the issue. It is not something that the Commission or the member states can settle on their own. At the end of the day, the European Parliament will have a democratic vote to decide whether to accept or reject TTIP.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Mr Duncan, I will come back to you but Mr Coburn got in first.

David Coburn: I agree with Mr Rowley that the last thing that we want is for TTIP to be getting involved in public services and damaging the health service. We do not want that to be the case—absolutely not. We believe that the health service should be protected against that.

Again, this is the problem if we allow the European Union to make decisions on the issue for the whole of Europe. I would much prefer to have the decision made in the UK by Westminster. It should not be made by the European Union, and people should not be allowed to sue. If a decision is made in Scotland, the fact that the Scottish Parliament has made a decision should be

respected and, as it has responsibility for health, the decision should stand.

As far as I am concerned, we should not allow TTIP to attack our public services. UKIP believes very strongly in the health service and we will do everything that we can to protect it.

Ian Duncan: Like my colleagues, I have had a lot of mail on this issue and, of course, I have been very concerned. At its heart, a free trade agreement should be a way of generating growth and generating jobs. However, it has now come down to very focused concerns, mostly around the health service and the investor-state dispute mechanism.

I sat with the chief negotiator on the issue so that I could fully understand it. It became clear in the discussions that the clauses that exist in the current trade agreements that were signed in the past are remarkably loose and poor. What has been achieved in the proposal—I say again that it is a proposal—is substantially different. It begs the question whether a number of the more prominent cases that are regularly cited would indeed have been possible under the new revised clause that is proposed for the investor-state dispute mechanism.

I look upon the issue of the healthcare service in a broader sense, not just in terms of privatisation—I do not fully accept the comments that were made in relation to that in any case. I recognise that there can be extraordinary benefits in this area, for example in support for medical devices, which can reduce the cost of such devices, which are so significant and important in our health service. We should also look at some of the issues around pharmaceuticals and other costs there and at research and sharing. The benefits can be seen, and will materially help the NHS. We need to be very careful when we are discussing this that we do not seek to prejudice.

When we talk about transparency, it is important to remember that this is the first time that we have ever really had transparency in such negotiations on proposed agreements. With previous free trade agreements, there was simply no transparency, so we have made a huge leap forward. The important point is that we are in the process of negotiating the language and the material, but if the European Parliament is not satisfied, we will not sign it off. If we are satisfied, we will ensure that we can explain why. The important thing is that the agreement is not a done deal. It is not a secret deal that will happen in a closed room; it will happen in Strasbourg in the chamber of the European Parliament and we will have an opportunity to ensure that we are exercising the will of the Scottish people.

Ian Hudghton: It is good that, so far, there seems to be broad agreement among the members from Scotland on the issue, because there are a host of issues that are important to us.

On why the EU should negotiate trade deals, I think that even the UK Government, which likes to tell us that it is very big and powerful, accepts that the EU has more negotiating power on the genuinely beneficial trade aspects of such agreements than it alone would have. That is why the UK Government supports the process although, to my mind, it is a little too careless—if that is the right word—about whether public services might be affected.

The most important thing arising from the committee's recent deliberations is that you are to have an inquiry on the issue from Scotland's point of view. The issue of different priorities in the health services in Scotland and England needs to be examined. I hope that your inquiry will draw that out and help us to do what we can to help to get it right at the end of the day.

David Coburn: Of course, one of the problems with all this is that, as Ian Duncan says, the agreement will go to the Parliament. We will say no, but the problem is that, basically, it is a Parliament of eunuchs. We actually have very little power because there is an in-built majority that supports the Commission, and it is difficult to change that. So the issue is not so simple.

The Convener: Jamie McGrigor has a quick supplementary.

Jamie McGrigor: It is on TTIP. The US has been clear that public sector services are never part of trade agreements. The greatest gain for the UK and in particular Scotland would relate to the oil and gas sector and financial services. Farmers' eyes are also lighting up—for example, I am told that the Scotch beef import ban might be lifted, which would be important for Scottish farmers. Will you comment on some of the benefits that could accrue to Scotland from a sensible and good agreement?

The Convener: Mr Martin, will you respond to that and make the other comment that you want to make?

David Martin: The benefits are potentially enormous. David Coburn makes a big play about financial services, but it is difficult for our banks and insurance companies to operate in the US market at present. One of the EU's offensive interests is to open up US financial services to competition from British and European companies. It is not parochial to think that Scottish companies could do particularly well in that market if it was open, free and fair.

An agreement would be good news for Scottish food and drink products—particularly for beef, as Jamie McGrigor said, but not just that. Some specialised fishing sectors, such as the prawn sector, find it difficult to access the US market, for sanitary and phytosanitary reasons, but I hope that we would deal with that in such a trade agreement.

Some textile companies in the Borders have serious concerns. Although the level of tariffs on textiles is on average very low, some significant tariff spikes prevent us from selling cashmere and other niche products in the US market.

I could go on. There are even very simple things—for example, Livingston-based electronics companies that make small components find it difficult to be part of supply chains because of technical barriers to trade. If we deal with all that, that could be good news for connecting us to the US market.

The Convener: I am conscious of the time, but does Mr Rowley want to come back in?

Alex Rowley: You all say that there is genuine concern, which you see from your mailbags. That takes me on to my key point.

In your submissions, you talk about the rise of Eurosceptic parties and of the right across Europe. If we are to address the concern that is being expressed about that, the idea of openness and transparency will be important. Our MEPs need to be much more proactive in pointing out the benefits of the EU and dealing with the concerns that exist, and it would be good to hear what you intend to do on that.

10:45

David Coburn: The rise of the far right is a worry. UKIP is not a right-wing party, of course—we are a libertarian party. In many ways, we agree with many things that the Labour Party says. We are more libertarian than any other party, in as much as we do not want to tell people what to do, whereas Liberal Democrats are extremely keen to tell people what to eat for breakfast and to tell them that they must not smoke or drink—basically, they do not want people to have much fun at all.

We are much more of a freedom-based party. We do not want to interfere in people's lives. To be frank, as long as the EU continues to interfere in people's lives without having a democratic mandate to do so, we will continue to see the rise of the right and of people such as Madame Le Pen.

David Martin: I tried not to respond to what David Coburn said earlier, but he has repeated it. The idea that the European Parliament simply rubber-stamps what the Commission does is

absolute nonsense. One of the biggest trade deals to be considered in the previous session of the European Parliament was the anti-counterfeiting trade agreement—ACTA. The European Parliament rejected it by the largest majority that it has ever rejected a Commission proposal by.

The idea that the Commission will negotiate and bring forward a treaty and that the Parliament will accept it, regardless of the content, is just not true. We will have tight and interesting debates when the agreements with Singapore and Canada come before the European Parliament. ACTA will not be accepted automatically; it will not be rubber-stamped.

Because of the attention that is being paid to TTIP, it will be highly controversial if it comes to the European Parliament. I think that, because of the timescale for negotiations, legal scrubbing and all the rest of it, TTIP will probably be dealt with in the next session of the European Parliament. Given the public attention on TTIP, the idea that MEPs will just say yes to it, regardless of the content, is nonsense. If David Coburn wants to be a serious member of the European Parliament, he should concentrate on the issues and make up his mind on the basis of the issues, not of simple prejudice.

Ian Duncan: I adopt a more prosaic approach. I have tried to be as active as I can be. I have sat with the chief negotiator and have written to the negotiators. We have had responses back from the director general for trade, which I have put on my website. I have also put up a number of the questions that are frequently asked, with the answers alongside them. We have had correspondence with Len McCluskey, who has had a number of concerns. I have written to him directly with information and have openly invited him to frame any additional questions that he might have, which I have said that I will pursue.

I want to ensure that I can ground any concerns that anyone has. I will always put on my website the material that I receive, so that I can be as open and transparent as possible. If anyone has any questions, they can tweet me, mail me or write to me and I will put all the information out there so that people can come back to me and query it. There should be no suggestion that we are not very active and engaged in telling people what we are up to.

Ian Hughton: David Martin said what I was going to say. It is completely and utterly untrue to suggest that the European Parliament has no power. In fact, the contrary is the case on the vast majority of the legislative work that we do.

David Coburn: The various trade ministers of Europe could get together and agree a US trade deal and cut out the middle man—the EU—

thereby cutting out all the flannel, money, expense and confusion that it involves. Everything could probably be done a lot more quickly and efficiently without the involvement of the EU.

That is beside the point. We all know that many things that are agreed in Europe are not done by democratic means. The people have spoken on that issue many times. They did so in the European Parliament election by putting UKIP first.

Catherine Stihler: We share the concerns that Alex Rowley identified. We have received thousands of expressions of interest from constituents who have written to us about TTIP. As Ian Duncan does, we have standard letters. All our committees seem to be having TTIP hearings that the negotiators come to, which are all web streamed. We are doing many things to address people's concerns. As the co-ordinator in the socialists group, David Martin is doing a fantastic job to put forward those concerns.

The trade committee is doing an excellent job of holding people to account. Each committee has a standing rapporteur on TTIP. That has never happened before. If the European and External Relations Committee was in the European Parliament, it would have a standing rapporteur among its members.

There are clearly issues that have to be addressed, but this is a negotiation. No deal is done until it is final. We have to keep a dialogue going on TTIP and we have to ensure that the Scottish Parliament provides information as well.

The Convener: In preparation for our inquiry, our clerks are looking closely at the lead that is being taken by all our European members.

Our final question is from Roderick Campbell, who will be very quick.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank Mr Rowley for raising the questions on TTIP, which were interesting. I particularly welcome the comments that were made about transparency.

I will move to one of Mr Juncker's 10 policy priorities, which is a new policy on migration. I am interested to hear comments on that.

Catherine Stihler: Mr Juncker has not proposed anything yet, so I cannot comment on the issue. Once the Commission's work programme is ready, that will be the opportunity to debate it.

David Coburn: UKIP believes that unlimited migration is an enormous problem for the UK in general and for Scotland in particular. If we have unlimited migration, we cannot decide what will happen with our health service or how to provide for it, and we will not be able to work out what

schools or buildings we need or just about anything else, for that matter. That is not in the UK's interests. It depresses wages for the working man and woman, which is not a good thing. If they are asked, they will say that they are voting for UKIP—that is happening progressively more—because they are worried about their position and their families.

Whatever the EU does on migration, unless all 28 countries agree to it, nothing will happen and, frankly, we cannot afford what we have got going on. This has to stop. UKIP is in favour of an Australian-style system whereby we choose who we want to come to the country and do not have an open-door immigration policy, which has created a great deal of trouble throughout the UK.

Ian Hudghton: As Catherine Stihler said, until we see a specific proposal, it is difficult to say exactly how we might react. However, I am reasonably confident in predicting that there will be no proposal to depart from the basic right of free movement of citizens in the EU. That is highly advantageous to Scotland and the rest of the UK.

When we talk about immigration, I do not include that right of free movement, because it is not immigration—it is one of our basic benefits. It is fair to say that there are estimated to be about as many people from the UK resident in other parts of the European Union as the other way around. Benefits go in both directions and that will continue.

Ian Duncan: Migrants enrich our country. I was brought up in a small village in Perthshire, where there is now a Polish aisle in our local co-op. Such people are an extraordinary asset to our country. However, I am aware that that view is not shared across the whole land, and we need to have a serious debate so that we can be sure that we are talking about migrants in a sensible way—as a huge economic, cultural and social asset.

David Martin: The committee is going to get an unusual level of consensus. I agree with my colleagues Ian Hudghton and Ian Duncan. Catherine Stihler is right that we do not have any detailed proposals yet and Ian Hudghton is right that this is not about internal EU movement. We are talking not about freedom of movement within the EU but about migrants coming from outside the EU.

I want to see Mr Juncker's proposals, which I hope will be about ensuring that we have a humanitarian system for dealing with migrants who come to Europe—I am sad to say that in some parts of Europe they are treated very badly; that we police our borders better but in a proper and humane manner; and that we do more to help the countries that are the source of the migrants to improve their economies and to stem the flow by

making living standards in the home country better.

The fact is that we just do not know what Mr Juncker means. I do not have the piece of paper in front of me, but I think that the 10 priorities are, frankly, bland. I remember the one about TTIP; it was along the lines of wanting a good and balanced TTIP, which is meaningless. To my mind, the priorities are just pious statements, and we need a Commission work programme to see how we will put flesh on them.

Roderick Campbell: How does the European Parliament plan to keep an eye on the problems of human trafficking in this session?

David Coburn: Human trafficking is an appalling business that we want to stop, and I am looking into it as much as possible. As you can imagine, it is very much a concern of UKIP, and we will do whatever we can. That will be very difficult in the European Union, given that 28 countries have to agree to change the open-door immigration policy.

The only way to stop trafficking is to leave the European Union. I am afraid that that is the logical conclusion. We can do nothing to stop trafficking, and the European Union is making no effort to do anything about the problems that it is causing. As Mr Rowley has pointed out, it is leading to the rise of the far right—and that is what people will get if open-door immigration is not stopped.

Ian Duncan: I am not sure that Mr Coburn has put his finger on the issue.

I am vice-chair of the south Asia delegation, and I am putting a paper on this very issue to that body. I am concerned about the issue, which we should be looking at in detail, and I would like to use that delegation to begin what I hope will be a wider debate. I know that Scotland has taken an active role in addressing the issue, and I think that the European Parliament is playing catch-up.

Catherine Stihler: I know the work that Roderick Campbell and Jenny Marra have done to address this important issue in Scotland. At a European level, where police forces can co-operate to conduct joint action, the collection of information is vital. That kind of co-operation is one of our strengths. As long as human trafficking and such treatment of individuals—particularly children and women—take place, we must continue to put pressure on the new Commission, as Roderick Campbell has outlined. That said, the Scottish Parliament, with its interest in tackling human trafficking, and we at a European level can work well together to tackle this horrific problem.

The Convener: We are seriously looking forward to legislation on the matter.

David Martin: The meeting that I attended before I came here was of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights. To counter David Coburn's allegation that nothing ever happens in Europe, I point out that, at that meeting, a paper called "Foreigners and human rights in Morocco: for a radically new asylum and migration policy" was presented by the president of the National Human Rights Council in Morocco. The work was funded partly by the European Union as a way of helping Morocco to deal with migration more widely and human trafficking specifically.

The Convener: Thank you. I think that we are going to have to finish—

David Coburn: Can I make a very brief point?

The Convener: Very quickly, please.

David Coburn: I am pleased that my European colleagues from various political parties are coalescing around UKIP's view on immigration. That is probably something to do with the fact that we came within 300 votes of capturing a safe Labour seat in the north of England and that we are about to capture a Tory seat in the south.

David Martin: I find Mr Coburn's views on immigration abhorrent.

Catherine Stihler: I agree with my colleague David Martin on that point.

The Convener: Thank you very much for your contributions. I know that we have taken serious advantage of your time this morning by going half an hour over what was allotted, and we very much appreciate that. We will move forward with our inquiries about our programme for Europe and specifically the TTIP stuff. We might need to rely greatly on Mr Martin to feed us some information for our work. On the committee's behalf, I thank all of you for coming along.

Meeting closed at 10:59.

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