



GREENS
FOR
A
BETTER
EUROPE

TWENTY YEARS OF UK GREEN INFLUENCE
IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, 1999 –2019

EDITED BY LIAM WARD WITH JAMES BRADY

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Chapter 3

London, Brussels and beyond: my work as a Green MEP

Jean Lambert

Welcome at last

‘Welcome at last’. This was the greeting from Juan Behrend, Co-Secretary General of the Green Group in the European Parliament, when I arrived at the Group’s first meeting after the 1999 European election. It was the first in the UK to be held by a method of proportional representation. I knew Juan, and many others at that meeting to set up the Group for the 1999–2004 term, through my years as a UK Green Party of England and Wales representative to the European Green Coordination (forerunner of the European Green Party) and as my party’s ‘guest’ MEP in the 1989 Green Alternative European Link (GRAEL) group, which was the first coordinated group of its kind led by the Greens. For two-and-a-half years, I had been a member of the Group’s executive body (the Bureau), had attended and voted at meetings of the Group, and had represented it at times, such as supporting the then Czechoslovakian Greens (*Strana Zélèny*) in the first election after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

How had this come about? It was the result of the 1989 European election, when, under the previous disproportional electoral system (first-past-the-post), the UK Greens gained an average of 14.5% of the vote but no MEPs.¹ Under a proportional system, we would have

been the largest national green delegation. The European Greens wanted to acknowledge the injustice of the result, and Sara Parkin (Secretary of the European Green Coordination) negotiated an honorary position in the Group for our party. This was offered to me and I took it without hesitation. It proved to be a very valuable apprenticeship. This meant that when the Labour government introduced the regional list system of proportional election in 1999, I had a good idea as to how the Group worked and why the Greens really mattered in the European Parliament. I knew I wanted to join then and that it could be possible in the ten-MEP-member region of London.

I was fortunate enough to be voted in as number one on the London Green Party list. We ran the London campaign on the basis of 'Your Vote Counts': if one in ten voters votes green, a Green MEP will be elected. We could show that we were part of a European political family that was already elected at the European level and getting results. People understand that environmental issues cross borders, so cross-border working is essential. The proportional electoral system meant voting Green was not a wasted vote.

The election of two Greens (myself in London and Caroline Lucas in South East England) was also a momentous moment for the Green Party, although it was largely unnoticed by the British press, which seemed to be more taken up with the election of UKIP: a recurrent problem, as it has turned out. At that point, we had only two Green councillors elected in London (but more in the country generally), and the Greater London Authority had yet to come into being; its first elections were held the following year. However, a month earlier, in May 1999, we had seen the election of Scottish Green Robin Harper to the new Scottish Parliament.

Arriving in the European Parliament with real MEPs in 1999, the UK Green Party had a clear view on our priorities in terms of committee membership when it came to negotiations in the Group. We wanted my wonderful colleague, Caroline Lucas, on the Trade Committee, as she was a policy advisor on trade at Oxfam. The Party had (and still has) a highly critical approach to the World Trade Organization (WTO) agenda, and we wanted those objections raised.

I had prioritised the Constitutional Affairs Committee, as we knew major EU Treaty changes were being contemplated. As a council member of the UK campaign group Charter 88, I had a strong interest in constitutional issues such as introducing a written constitution for the UK (how useful that would have been in many of our national issues with the EU, not least in determining the basis on which we could change that relationship) as well as the entrenchment of international human rights standards and electoral systems.

However, any negotiation means being prepared to give ground on some things if you can achieve your main aim, so Caroline joined the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy and I agreed to join the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. I also managed to secure a 'substitute' position on the Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs Committee, arguing that, as I represented the EU's most diverse city, it would be useful to be on the committee dealing with anti-discrimination,² asylum and immigration. Plus I've had a long-standing commitment to anti-racism.

I also picked up a working seat on the Petitions Committee. All EU residents have the individual Treaty right to petition the European Parliament if they feel that their rights under EU legislation have not been upheld, or that legislation has not been properly applied by EU or national authorities. The Petitions Committee proved a very useful place to learn about areas of EU law that I was not engaged with through my committee work. It also meant I could support particular petitions in the committee and help individual citizens or groups to address the committee at times.

I worked with objectors to plans for developments at Crystal Palace to bring their case to the committee.³ Partly as a result of this, the Commission engaged with the UK government to improve the quality of training and guidance for local authority planning officers in terms of implementing the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. The petitioners may not have got everything they wanted from the EU, but they had an impact.

As an elected Green who was not on the environment or agriculture committees, finding a point of contact on such issues needed consideration and some adaptation to take into account the very

welcome election of three Greens to the Greater London Authority's London Assembly in 2000: Darren Johnson, Jenny Jones (now Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb) and Victor Anderson.

I decided to focus on the directives coming on stream that were linked to the Aarhus Convention (2005/370/EC) and commissioned the Environmental Law Foundation (ELF) to conduct an analysis of how UK planning law matched up with existing EU law as well as new proposals. One of the benefits of being a Green MEP is the information monies we have to promote and explain our work and to develop ideas. For me, planning law shapes our environment and is very much underestimated as a tool for giving the latter a greener design.



Figure 1. Jean campaigning to save Queen's Market, East London.

I also became involved in the Thames Gateway 'green' initiative under the leadership of Professor Mark Brearley (of the University of East London), which promoted the concept of a green grid running through the development in order to provide nature corridors as well

as walking and cycling possibilities. This concept was taken up by my green colleagues on the London Assembly and has now become an official London government strategy.

In the early days after the election, I found people would contact their Green MEP as a sort of 'higher court of appeal' for local environmental issues, such as their neighbouring restaurants' emissions. My London staff generally answered those letters, pointing people to the appropriate authority or advice service. Maybe it's my teaching background, but it's always been important to me to help people understand which level of government is appropriate to help with their problem. The EU is not the overall control body that many assume it is.

When I first started out, I also found that I had a big question to answer: 'Who you do represent?' I believe it is a myth that you represent all of your constituents when you clearly can't. I decided that London – as in the territorial City and big business – had enough people representing its interests in the EU (which is partly at the root of our current problems), but London's poorer communities did not. Also, if you're a lone MEP trying to represent what the EU can offer, you need to get your voice out, and the best way, I felt, was to work with communities of interests across London, as it was not possible to represent everyone. I felt, too, that there were many people who never thought the Greens had anything to say to them; they saw us as only caring about sea and trees, not about equality – whether between people or within societies – or tackling poverty. Given the committees I was on, there was a clear opportunity to reach out.

A major recipient of the EU Social Fund is London, as, while it is one of the EU's richest regions, it has areas of significant deprivation, a skills shortage, relatively high youth unemployment and the highest rate of child poverty of any English region. So, a good way to get to know London was to visit EU-funded projects, often meeting people who had never met 'a real MEP' before, let alone a Green one. I learnt about how EU money works at the grassroots, through training older workers in computer skills (which are essential in today's labour market), providing nursery assistant training for

female refugees, teaching people English or training young men as gym instructors. I saw how that money was being used to help civil society organisations meet local needs, and to assist local authorities in delivering more services through matching EU funding.

The then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, was active in both promoting London and securing EU funding through London House in Brussels. A number of EU regions and cities have set up such bodies. London House was used to showcase the work of London's policies and voluntary sector. London's MEPs were included as part of the capital's representation and that helped our visibility.

All that ended when Boris Johnson became Mayor of London. London no longer had a visible presence in the Parliament. I remember receiving one letter from the Mayor: he was asking me not to support the introduction of any financial transaction tax (FTT), as it would be bad for London's financial sector. Unfortunately for Mayor Johnson, Greens are long-standing advocates of an FTT.

I also received one invitation to the launch of a Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas (JESSICA) funded project: setting up the London Green Fund (LGF). This included finance for the improvement of energy efficiency in London's social housing stock. The Commissioner for Regional Affairs, Danuta Hübner, was introduced by the Mayor, in his usual charming fashion, as he muttered that he really didn't think we should be in the EU. Nevertheless, London took the money and it has proved to be a very valuable initiative. Ironically, Danuta Hübner is now an MEP and chairs the Constitutional Affairs Committee, which is responsible for the European Parliament's Brexit response.

Green jobs

Obviously there have been ongoing, major environmental issues in London with a clear EU dimension: air quality and airport expansion, particularly Heathrow, for example. This has been shared work for the Greens at various levels of government both in and around London.

I was involved from its early days in the Clean Air in London campaign, led by the inspiring Simon Birkett. However, the London Assembly Greens were able to have a more immediate impact on policy in London from the get-go, helped early on by then Mayor of London Ken Livingstone. He needed their votes to get his budget through, which resulted in £500 million for cycling initiatives.⁴ This impressive work has been continued by current Green Assembly Members Caroline Russell and Sian Berry. As members of the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, Caroline Lucas and Keith Taylor (successive Green MEPs for the South East) have pushed Clean Air initiatives in the EU. I have written to and raised air quality issues with the Commission, responded to numerous consultations at the EU, UK and London levels, spoken in public meetings and produced London-focused information materials.⁵



Figure 2. Green jobs: Jean visiting a recycling plant in London.

We've developed a similar pattern of work in opposing airport expansion, where the issue of air quality joins with the pressing issue of combatting climate change: air transport is one of the fastest growing

sources of greenhouse gas emissions. The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs has also offered an opportunity to consolidate our work on climate change, environmental protection and jobs.

In the earlier days of the environmental movement, there was an attitude among many trade unions and certain businesses that environmental goals and the Greens were bad for jobs. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have always argued that an ecological transformation of society would open the door for new industries, and that many would be more locally based as opposed to offshore.

While wider industrial policy is covered by the European Parliament's Industry, Research and Energy Committee, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs has a role in employment strategy, setting targets, determining skills input, and identifying particular groups that are vulnerable on the labour market and how to work with them.

In my work on green jobs, I have aimed to get the environment and climate included in strategic planning and to address a wider need to feature both in employment policy as a whole. I managed as early as 2006 to get an environmental dimension included and recognised as a key component in the educational part of the EU's sustainability strategy. In 2004 I also commissioned a study from Capacity Global, *Integrating Social Inclusion and Environment: Exploring the Potential for Joined-up Thinking*,⁶ to examine how well the EU's proposals for National Action Plans for employment and social inclusion actually integrated economic, social and environmental strands. Unsurprisingly, the main conclusion was that, while the economic and social strands complemented each other, the environment came a very poor third. Part of the study included focus group discussions with young people from deprived areas in London and Hamburg, which looked at their experience of training and education. A number of those taking part said they wanted to know more about the environment and how their work training could help to improve this. However, they felt they had been taught little or nothing on the subject. An issue raised by the adults involved was that they would like to do more, but 'who trains the trainers?'. A good question and one I've worked to help answer.

I began to ask questions of commissioners and the EU agencies linked to the Employment Committee. These included the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). ‘What is your strategy to promote investment and/or training in green jobs?’, I asked. It was interesting, and sometimes depressing, to hear the replies. For some, especially ministers representing Council or nonemployment commissioners, I was speaking a foreign language politically. However, the answers have improved over time as policies have developed and understanding has grown. Greens have certainly played an important role in that. I took the requests from the Capacity Global study and, in 2006 (during my second term), commissioned a DVD from Redcurrent Films to show how ideas from the grassroots could be taken into and heard by the Parliament and various agencies.⁷

EU4U! was made by college students and filmed mainly in the European Parliament. It looked at the committees’ work and how their requests were now, partly, in the EU Sustainability Strategy and could be taken further. It seemed to me to be really important to show young people that they are not voiceless in the European Union. This was also why I was happy to help support the setting up of the European Parliament’s cross-party Youth Intergroup at the start of my third term in 2009.⁸ We also produced a publication in London to highlight what could be done in the capital to increase energy efficiency in the city’s housing stock: *Hothouses* (2007).⁹ This linked the job creation potential across all skill levels with the Energy Efficiency of Buildings Directive (2010/31/EU) and the need to deliver on targets for reducing climate change emissions.

In 2008 I produced another publication: *Green Work: Employment and Skills – The Climate Change Challenge*.¹⁰ This tied in well with the publication of a major report from the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organisation, *The Green Jobs Initiative: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable Low-carbon World*, in September that year.¹¹ This powerful report

showed the large opportunities in employment there would be in a world that took climate change seriously. It also stressed the importance of decent work, fair pay and good working conditions rather than exploitation and rock-bottom pay. This fitted with work I'd been doing on the Working Time Directive (2003/88/EC) as well as the Temporary Agency Work Directive (2008/104/EC). The United Nations (UN) report also stressed the need for 'just transition' in terms of providing support and investment in and for those whose jobs would disappear as greenhouse gas emissions reduced, such as workers in the fossil fuel industries. This report aligned with what Greens had been saying for years and gave a new dynamism to those in the 2009 Commission, which came forward with *Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*.¹²

I wanted the Greens to add to the momentum created by the UN report. I had the opportunity to do this with the UK-based Campaign Against Climate Change, which helped me to strengthen connections with some of the UK trade unions such as the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT). These were committed to making progress on tackling climate change and wanted to do more in the workplace. I gave talks to professional bodies (such as the Royal College of Occupational Therapists) keen to make changes in their own working environments. The active engagement of people at work is crucial to embedding environmental thinking throughout an organisation.

I used some of the information monies available to me as an MEP to produce a DVD on green jobs.¹³ This used three London businesses – the Arcola Theatre, Calverts Press and Acorn House Restaurant – to show that an environmentally conscious business can take many organisational forms: a charity, a workers cooperative, a social enterprise. The DVD was launched at the Arcola Theatre and inspired a lot of interest, including from a local kebab takeaway. The EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Lazlo Andor, even used the DVD for in-house training on 'what is a green job?'. Along with Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary Frances O'Grady, he spoke at a major conference I organised on this subject the following year.

With the change of Commission in 2014, at the start of my fourth term, many of us felt there was a risk of the ‘just transition’ concept fading in importance as we slid back to the old ‘growth and jobs’ agenda. So, we decided, as the Greens–European Free Alliance, to push for what’s known as an ‘own initiative’ report (INI for short), which is nonlegislative, to respond to the outgoing Commission’s pro-proposals on the ‘Green employment initiative: tapping into the job-creation potential of the green economy’ (2014/2238(INI)). We managed to convince the coordinators in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (representatives from each of the political groups in the Parliament) that it would be good for us to have an official response. My group was assigned the report and I took it on as rapporteur.



Figure 3. Our green economic future: event with Commissioner Andor and TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady. *Photo:* David Connolly.

The group and I used this opportunity to talk to a range of experts and interested parties on the issue. We ran two roundtables, one in London and one in Brussels, and invited academics, trade unions, green businesses, business bodies for small and large companies, students, representatives from education and training establishments and relevant professional bodies to contribute ideas. Generally, the committee backed my key points, for example, on the need for an education and training framework that moves from a general awareness of the need for resource efficiency and emissions reductions to sectoral

and specific work training, and for strategic investment in the wider setting of needing to aim for a green economy in general. We held a Green Group Conference to reinforce the report's influence.

I was invited by the EU's environmental commissioner to speak at the Commission's Green Week in 2017, which focused on green jobs and made a written contribution to a European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) conference on the topic later that year. At the UK end, we used much of the work from the report to strengthen our response to the UK government's consultation on its proposed industrial strategy.¹⁴ It was disappointing – to put it diplomatically – to see the government fail to have a clear focal point for a resource-efficient, climate-emissions-compliant strategy. However, this is indicative of the inability of so many politicians to get their heads around the way in which political goals need to change in light of the challenges facing us.

South Asia

Apart from my committee work in the European Parliament, I also chair one of its permanent delegations to countries with which the EU has trading relationships. I am responsible for the Delegation for Relations with the Countries of South Asia (DSAS). This covers six countries around India (which has its own delegation): Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. While Bangladesh and the Maldives are well known as being vulnerable to climate change in terms of rising sea levels, Sri Lanka has ranked fourth in Germanwatch's latest Global Climate Risk Index top ten, and Pakistan has ranked as the seventh most vulnerable country for *long-term* climate risk, just below Bangladesh.¹⁵ The governments and people of the six countries covered by DSAS will all tell you that they are already seeing the effects of climate change. They will also point out that, as a nation, they are not significant contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Himalayas provide the world's 'third pole' and are the source of fresh water for approximately 1.4 billion people. Increasingly,

hydroelectric power is a source of energy and income for the countries and regions of the Himalayas. As a delegation chair who is also a Green, I have tried to give this part of the world a voice in the Parliament on climate issues. Until recently, the Maldives chaired the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), which acts as an informal grouping within the UNFCCC. I invited their chair to speak to us and asked environmental NGOs and other ambassadors to contribute. We have also invited the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to address us, and we have created other opportunities in the Parliament and with the Commission. Of course, climate change is not the only pressing issue in the region, but it will affect all other policy areas, and it puts additional pressures on the existing tensions within society.

I have also focused heavily on the garment and textile industry in South Asia and beyond. The horrors of the Tazreen fire and the collapse of the Rana Plaza building on the outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh, which killed over 1,000 people, raised many questions as to how global companies take responsibility for their supply chains.¹⁶ This scrutiny also provides a challenge to developing countries to look at how their governments can take more control over the quality of their industries yet remain competitive in global markets, where companies often have more effective power than national governments.

The Delegation has returned to the issue over the years since the tragedies, in both Brussels and Bangladesh as well as on visits to Pakistan, now a beneficiary of the EU's GSP+ trading scheme (an extension of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences). Corporate social responsibility and supply-chain compliance are important areas of debate in the European Parliament, where many of us have been pushing the Commission and Council to go further to make companies more transparent and more responsible for their supply chains. The voluntary approach is not enough, as bad practices will always undermine good. It should be noted that UK Conservative MEPs have always voted for the voluntary approach.

I have hosted a number of events in the European Parliament on the ready-made garment (RMG) sector: some with NGOs such as

CARE International and the Clean Clothes Campaign, and others where I have set the agenda, such as arranging a screening of *The True Cost* (a film directed by Andrew Morgan). I also put on an exhibition in the square outside of the European Parliament, comprised of photos taken by Bangladeshi photographers of both the Rana Plaza collapse and some of the survivors, taken after treatment. The EU Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström, also agreed to speak at a conference I hosted, to set out her commitment to improving supply chains.



Figure 4. With Rebecca Harms MEP and Malala Yousafzai – Pakistani activist, Sakharov Prize winner and Nobel laureate.

The delegation connection has given me the opportunity to speak about the fashion industry and supply chains at demonstrations, at universities including Harvard, and with manufacturers, brands, trade unions and governments. It has provided me with an opportunity to question the way the industry works, the issues of consumption and disposal, and the environmental cost of the fashion industry – reckoned to be the second most-polluting industry in the world. I also

drafted the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs's response to the Commission Flagship Initiative on the garment sector, where we were able to comment on labour and factory inspections and draw attention to the poor conditions and pay in many EU garment factories. This is a global issue and many of the measures now being taken in Bangladesh should provide an example for the way forward.

Chairing the DSAS has also given me the opportunity to travel to these countries along with colleagues from other political groups. I am always impressed by the support we get from the EU Ambassadors and European External Action Service (EEAS) when we travel, and the willingness of ministers, MPs and civil society activists to meet with us.

These meetings can be very sensitive. Official EU delegations are charged with raising issues of human rights, including the death penalty, to which, I am pleased to say, the EU has a principled objection. It can be difficult to raise that with MPs who have just lifted their national moratorium after over a hundred children have died in a terrorist attack, as at Peshawar, or a few days after the execution of those convicted of the murder of family members of the nation's prime minister, as in Bangladesh. Yet we raise it.

It is also difficult to raise questions around the impunity of military personnel or police officers in times of conflict, as in Sri Lanka, or of repressive laws against human rights defenders. We are sometimes accused of promoting a 'Western agenda', but I always stress that these are international conventions and values that we are upholding, designed to improve the lives and security of the citizens of any country. As a Green, I can also point out that we hold the EU and our governments to those same standards: this is not so easy for some from other parties.

While travelling with the delegation, we also visit projects supported by the EU. Many of these are concerned with women's empowerment, from small microcredit schemes to advocacy for marginalised groups, such as the Dalits or the indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

International aid matters and, done well with local communities and governments, it transforms lives. The EU is seen as an honest

partner that supports people and good governance without ‘dictating’ to governments in the way that some other global powers do. But there are those who remind you that ‘we have other friends’, as it was once put to me, who don’t make demands regarding human rights and better democracy. That is why it is important to meet ministers and politicians on their own ground. In my experience, it really helps you to understand the context and culture within which they are working and to find a way forward that can work for the benefit of the people. The EU’s broader work supporting democracy internationally is also important, which is why I’ve participated in EU election observation missions in Africa and Asia.

Asylum, displacement and diversity

When talking about the EU’s Common European Asylum System, or the development of its immigration policy, I often feel like a living history exhibit. Both of these areas were introduced in the Treaty of Amsterdam (adopted in 1997).

One of the earliest trips I took was to represent the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs at a meeting of the Migrants Forum in Casablanca in October 1999. Wondering what to say about the EU’s position on third-country nationals (non-EU citizens) in the EU, I was helped by the timely adoption of the Tampere Council Conclusions (named after the Finnish city where they were adopt-ed).¹⁷ It sent out a political message on the creation of ‘an area of freedom, security and justice in the European Union’ under the Treaty of Amsterdam. It also set up the mechanism for drawing up a draft Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Conclusions are worth reading in their own right for those who think the EU is a valuable institution. They declare that the rights of third-country nationals should be ‘approximated to [those] of Member State nationals’, the caveat being that said nationals should be legally staying within a member state.

The statement of intent from Tampere is something I have taken seriously in all of my work on migration within the Parliament – and

I have done a lot of it, both in terms of legislation and in other ways. I have also worked on the rights of undocumented migrants, for whom many governments have the single, public solution of ‘deportation’, neglecting to examine why so many people find themselves in this situation. This is one reason why I have supported the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) since it was set up in 2012. I find it shocking that so many governments still have no effective system for tackling this issue of people existing like ghosts in our societies, as they have no documentation to establish an identity. Quite rightly, people are aghast at Myanmar’s treatment of the Rohingya, who have been settled in the country for generations but denied citizen-ship and basic rights.



Figure 5. EU election observation mission, Sierra Leone. *Photo:* Press office, EU Election Observation Mission Sierra Leone.

Yet there are many people living within our own countries without an identity or a country they can legally claim is theirs. I helped the ENS bring their concerns before the Parliament via a study I proposed the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and

Home Affairs should commission, along with a hearing to follow up and reinforce the work of the 2015 Luxembourg Presidency on the issue. At least it is now seen as a priority for children's rights, as I have also helped the Parliament's cross-party group on children's rights (of which I'm a founding member and vice-president) to invest in working to ensure that no child is stateless. In addition, I have supported organisations such as the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and Doctors of the World in their work to ensure that no-one in need of health-care is left untreated. To me, it makes no sense to deny primary healthcare to children or refuse to treat people with life-threatening conditions or infectious diseases because they cannot provide the right documents.

In the Parliament, and outside it, I am viewed as one of the few MEPs who provides a strong voice for asylum seekers and refugees. Even before I was elected as an MEP, I had a keen interest in the topic and had been following a professional development course on 'language acquisition for young people of migrant backgrounds and asylum seekers' at my local Further Education college. Asylum seekers are some of the world's most vulnerable people. They are not all fleeing conflict in boats but come from a wide range of countries and social circumstances. The world is a mess and people are forced to move, sometimes alone and sometimes en masse. I find it difficult to understand why 'asylum seeker' is often seen as such a dirty term by many in politics and society as a whole.

I appreciate that we need to help prevent conflict and promote good governance and human rights elsewhere in the world so that people do not have to flee oppression. In which case, it would be great if governments were more willing to donate to help those countries supporting the most refugees: Tunisia or Lebanon in our own neighbourhood, or Bangladesh and Pakistan elsewhere, for example. As you can probably sense, this issue makes me angry, so – along with others in the Parliament and outside – I channel that emotion to affect policy and legislation. Over the years, I have been responsible for a number of parliamentary reports, some legislative, for the Common European Asylum System.

I was the rapporteur on the regulation that set up the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). This assists member states and the EU in implementing our asylum system properly, which is an uphill struggle. I was pleased we managed to keep and strengthen the role of the Consultative Body for EASO, which gives them a range of expertise – from academics, NGOs, local authorities (thanks to input from the Committee of the Regions rapporteur) and others – to draw on.

My work on the Qualification Directive proved frustrating, as the Parliament's progressive views are held back by national governments in Council. This directive sets out the grounds on which people can qualify for, or lose, international protection. We achieved a parliamentary majority for a progressive report on the first version of the directive, but the Parliament was only consulted at that stage. When we received the reissued (recast) directive to consider in 2011 and I was again the rapporteur, there were parts the Parliament was not allowed to amend; so, although it was then a co-decision process, we had less chance of winning. We did, however, manage to introduce 'gender identity' into the text as grounds for consideration. This was a first in asylum legislation and was achieved through working with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), who lobbied specific national governments to get a majority in Council – a strategy often neglected by NGOs, who tend to concentrate on the European Parliament alone.

Hopefully, as Greens, we will have a major impact on the new version of the Dublin Regulation, which determines the member state responsible for handling an asylum claim. This is a dossier I have worked on throughout my time in the Parliament and have generally voted against. We feel the current version denies asylum seekers any element of agency in deciding which country they wish to claim asylum in, ignoring any links they might have (apart from some family ties) and 'trapping' them in the first EU country or safe country they come to.

Over the years, it has become clear that some countries end up dealing with many more cases than others, as different trouble spots erupt and travel routes shift. In my visits to reception centres in the Canaries, North Africa (Ceuta and Melilla), Malta and Italy, I have

seen systems struggling to cope on the ground, while other member states find reasons not to support them and send asylum seekers back to their country of entry if they have moved on. So, I was one of the Greens that commissioned a report from Richard Williams, former EU representative for the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), to look at how we could redesign the Dublin system to make it more *solidaire* and share the responsibility around. This proposal has now strongly influenced the official position of the Parliament.

So, one legislative institution of the EU is doing its job to deliver a Common European Asylum System, while too many member states cling to their national arguments. Member states do need to be pushed to deliver on the legislation they have passed. The issue of safeguarding children in the asylum system has become ever-more important, not least due to the total failure of the French and British governments to find a way of ensuring under-18s are helped to join family members in the UK, as they are entitled to do under the law. A key initiative was recently taken up by Citizens UK (a brilliant organisation, in my view), which set up Safe Passage to help those children, filling the gap left by state authorities. French Green MEP Karima Delli and I nominated this organisation for an EU Citizens prize, which enabled it to gain access to the Commission and governments to help make progress.¹⁸

I was also instrumental in providing legal text to improve the protection of children in asylum law and legislation on the return of illegally staying third-country nationals. I have mixed feelings about this, as I always thought the returns text on detention was inadequate; however, it proved to be an improvement on the proposed text for the Receptions Conditions Directive! It is at points like these that I value the Green Group's approach of constructive engagement with the legislative process. We may only make small gains at times, but these gains can have a positive effect on people's lives.

Of course, in addition to changing legal text, there is the wider issue of changing the overall culture in which decisions about asylum and immigration are made. There has been a growing movement in some countries, reflected in the governments coming to power, that wishes to close borders to those seen as not fitting their 'national'

identity. This is spoken of as the need to protect national cultures, with those seeking asylum (or immigrants – the choice of word is often indicative of a political position) being viewed as a threat to that culture, particularly if they are Muslim. This thread of thinking is not specifically Eastern European, although statements from the so-called Visegrád Group (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic) may give that impression. I can remember sitting in the Parliament hearing then Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar speaking of a ‘clash of civilisations’ after the horrific Madrid bombings. We have also seen the way in which UKIP have instrumentalised ‘Turkey’ as code for ‘Muslim’, to stoke fear of ‘the other’.

This perspective denies the role of Islam in Europe’s history and assumes that culture is static: if it were, I – a woman – would not be sitting in the European Parliament. This is a fact I like pointing out to those such as the Swedish Democrats, whose female member sits in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (now as a member of the ECR Group, founded by the British Conservatives). Working on the issue of cultural shifts is one reason why I am a co-president of the intergroup on anti-racism and diversity, which works with civil society to promote diversity and equality within the EU. We have hosted events on tackling Islamophobia and Afrophobia, and on promoting greater diversity within the EU’s own institutions.

Migration

Throughout my time in the Parliament, I have worked on legislation tackling discrimination on various grounds, whether in the workplace or in society more generally, and in promoting the work of the EU’s national equality bodies set up under that legislation. These bodies were largely modelled on the UK’s sectoral commissions, such as what was the Commission for Racial Equality, and make a significant contribution to protecting people’s rights within the EU. In the UK, we have seen the merging of agencies and significant funding cuts. Despite the UK’s decision to leave the EU, I hope that the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) will

remain within the European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet), as we have a lot to offer other countries. I have aimed to bring that experience into the EU via my work on integrating migrant workers, tackling terrorism and combatting hate speech.



Figure 6. Sangatte Red Cross refugee centre, near Calais in northern France.

Immigration is also a field in which I have worked on much of the EU's legislation, despite the UK opting out of virtually every piece of legislation that might affect the rights of third-country nationals to cross our borders (even in terms of providing support to victims of trafficking, on which the UK has adopted parallel legislation!). I worked with my London Assembly colleague Jenny Jones to help shift the government's position so that victims of trafficking would be supported and not just deported.¹⁹ I have used the Tampere Conclusions as my guide, along with the question 'what would we want as migrants?'. The answer is to bring the rights of immigrants and nationals as close together as possible.

My contact with migrant organisations in London, such as the Migrants' Rights Network, has also been valuable in forming my

views on migrants' rights. One key factor for me is the right to good administration (first championed in the Parliament's Petitions Committee). The total inefficiency and hostility of the UK's own Home Office is breathtaking at times, as the casework in my office shows. We have fed into numerous consultations on this. We have worked with groups such as Brides Without Borders to support the right of married couples to stay in the UK when the Home Office wants to deport one spouse, for example. I am proud to be a patron of the ice&fire theatre company, which has tackled this and a wide range of human rights issues through works such as *My Skype Family*.

There have been some minor successes in EU legislation, for example, on increasing the portability of pension rights, on providing better access to training and on achieving more rights for family members to accompany migrants from outside the EU. But there have been some failures as well. Most migrant workers are still not allowed to change jobs, which ties them to one employer, on whom they are dependent, and thus potentially leaves them open to exploitation. We may make some progress on this for domestic workers through the Parliament championing the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Domestic Workers, which I worked on in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.²⁰

We (the Greens) have still not managed to get a full understanding of circular migration: the ability to come, go and return more flexibly. The EU still works on a model of short-term migration, rather than offering a smooth path to potential settlement, which is not good for migrants, employers or society as a whole. Governments are very reluctant to see that migration is a fact of life and that development is not a substitution for migration. Rather, migration is a part of development; it changes the choices and the balance of power for countries and individuals. Many governments still place so many barriers in the way of recruitment, even for highly qualified people, that the EU risks missing out in many ways.

One area of change is in the growing recognition of the effect of climate change on population movements. This is a subject that has been close to my heart throughout my time in the European Parliament. I was one of the first politicians to work on the issue.

In 2002, I published a report titled *Refugees and the Environment: The Forgotten Element of Sustainability*.²¹ This was partly a response to those who couldn't understand why a green party politician was working on immigration and asylum: I wanted to show that there was a direct connection. Over the years, my views have shifted as I have come to understand the issues better. Although the environmental and climate pressures causing population displacement are increasing, I would no longer argue for a separate category of 'environmental refugee' or 'climate refugee'. However, the Green Group and some other organisations do sometimes still use this language.

I became disturbed by the way the prospect of many people being displaced, by rising sea levels in particular, was being portrayed as a threat by a number of development and environmental organisations to push for action on combatting climate change, playing into the view of refugees so often pushed by right-wing politicians. I felt this posed a risk to the better treatment of asylum seekers without necessarily shifting policy on climate. Fortunately, I was able to link up with the Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN), since renamed Climate Outreach, and we co-hosted a number of meetings at the European Parliament office in London to discuss these questions with a range of organisations. This led to the setting up of the Climate and Migration Coalition, which has worked on the topic ever since.

I have continued to work on the issue, most recently speaking to the Women Ambassadors group in Brussels at the invitation of the ambassador for Pakistan. It is now included in the UN's climate framework, and the European Parliament included it in our response to the UN's migration forum conference, held in Morocco in December 2018. However, inclusion does not imply solution, so there is still work to be done. I also believe that free movement within the EU will become a method of managed adaptation for climate displacement within the EU. The UK is opting out of this possibility.

The first piece of legislation I worked on in the Parliament was a revision of Regulation 1408/71 on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community (a title so snappy you were asleep before you reached the end!). This is one of the oldest pieces of EU legislation and concerns

the rights to social security for EU nationals working, residing or travelling in another member state. It is a key piece of law for millions of people. The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) that entitles you to urgent healthcare in another member state (on the same basis as a national of that country) when you're on holiday, for example, is linked to this legislation. The ability to pool, say, your German and UK state pension rights is also part of this, as is your access to family benefits if you are working in another EU/EEA country. It took five years' work to revise this major piece of legislation in a procedure where the Parliament theoretically had co-decision yet unanimity in Council was also required. I then went on to work for another five years on the implementing regulation that accompanies what is now Regulation 883/04, which sets out the rules to be followed. Improving the rights of citizens to be informed was a key change we got through.

During those ten years there was a marked difference in how that regulation was viewed. It was initially seen as boring and technical (which was why the Greens were allowed to work on it!) but was eventually presented by UKIP and the *Daily Express* as a 'new law' that would allow millions of Eastern Europeans (adapted to include Bulgarians and Romanians during the next phase of enlargement) to get their hands on British social security payments. A very partial truth, stretched almost far enough to break the elastic. No-one from the UK government corrected this over-the-top view or pointed out that this was a reciprocal arrangement, as is free movement.

The regulation became a focus of David Cameron's activity when he was seeking a 'better deal' from the EU and chose child benefits as an area for change. Instead of standing firm and saying 'this is a small sum and goes to people who are overwhelmingly contributing to the UK economy to support their families', he played into the view that it is 'unfair' for people to get benefits for children who are not in the UK. That 'deal' is now contaminating the latest revision of the regulation that I am currently working on – not as rapporteur, though, as big political groups now think it is politically important rather than technical, so the Greens are no longer allowed to be in charge.

The failure to manage and explain the rules of free movement has proved to be a monumental failure of successive UK governments.

The UK was not consistent in the advice it gave to people arriving in the UK after 2004 about registering with the authorities. Local housing bodies were being asked for advice, for which they were given no additional resources. Indeed, it has been known for years that many EU nationals have no right to Housing Benefit (it's not social security under the regulation), and the resources of many voluntary bodies have been strained because of this.



Figure 7. Trade union demonstration in Strasbourg on the Working Time Directive.

I managed to get a funding line opened up in the EU's Social Fund, which helped support a project between the London Borough of Westminster and Polish organisations such as Barka to try to deal with this, but there is still no real answer or prospect of bridging this gap between national systems. I have been working with FEANTSA, the EU network of organisations dealing with homelessness, on a recent project on the issue. This supported challenges in the UK courts when the Conservative government decided that homelessness was grounds for deporting EU nationals, regardless of whether they were employed or should have been receiving social security or other payments. A real shame that the government decided to opt for deportation rather than solve the real problems.

I am a champion of free movement within the EU. Only about 3% of EU nationals use that right, but it broadens understanding, opens up many opportunities, and has economic and social benefits. However, it needs government and local authority support to work properly. The rules are there but the British government has chosen not to implement them. The government could choose to really implement the law that ensures employers pay at least the minimum wage, but it doesn't. The Conservative government has indicated that it wants to step back from the law on protecting temporary agency workers, which I helped to negotiate in Brussels. The Working Time Directive is another law unpopular with this British government (and its predecessors) that I – along with many in the Trade Union movement – have fought to improve and defend. I published a report titled *I Must Work Harder?* to make the case for this health and safety legislation in the face of opposition from the then Labour government.²² I also leafleted outside London Bridge station to encourage people to respond to the Commission's consultation before they proposed a revision, which has never made it to the statute books.

In another area, I was the rapporteur for a report by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs covering access to care for groups vulnerable because of the financial crisis. The report proposed measures to protect care services in the face of government

cuts, including a proposal that asked for EU legislation to guarantee ‘carer’s leave’ from work. As a result, this was proposed in the Directive on Work–Life Balance, which is under negotiation at the time of writing. This could see the right to carer’s leave protected in law.²³

As we face the prospect of leaving the EU, all this work and the positive effects the EU has had on people’s lives in the UK needs to be protected and, hopefully, improved. We must not compete on the international stage on the basis of lowering workers’ rights and protections. It is essential that we safeguard the rights of those who have exercised their right to free movement, and who are now seeing those rights removed. We set a precedent with the Windrush-era migrants and should uphold that principle, but we need a fully functioning Home Office that looks to say ‘yes, these are your rights’ rather than finding ways to dismiss them.

What happens next?

Brexit is a constitutional crisis, in many respects stemming from an England used to seeing itself as superior and powerful being unable to come to terms with a changing world in which it is no longer dominant. The desire to go for stronger Commonwealth links is indicative of that. I can envisage the UK split apart by a shift to a united Ireland or an independent Scotland, leaving a divided Eng-land with a disconnected and discontented Wales.

Brexit was fuelled by austerity, inequality, underinvestment, misinformation and political complacency, partly derived from the first-past-the-post voting system. Brexit’s multiple negative effects are already being felt and will continue to be felt across the country for years, probably decades, after leaving the EU. This will include the loss of important EU funding and connectedness to the conti-nent.²⁴ This is why Greens have continued to strongly oppose Brexit. It doesn’t help that our electoral system is a denial of diversity. It’s a major challenge in the UK, exacerbated by potential boundary changes and the Tory and Labour addiction to first-past-the-post.

We can see in the European Parliament how it is possible for par-ties to work together on certain issues and find a way forward, while still retaining their identities. Compromise is not a dirty word, as it seems to be in UK politics. This British perception of how politics is done is part of what has contributed to the mess of the Brexit negoti-ations: too many old-style politicians see negotiations as a battle with one winner rather than a way to deliver a positive future working relationship. One thing is clear: there’s so much that UK politicians could learn from their neighbours in Europe. I would prefer that we do this as part of the EU. We are stronger together.

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