



PRESS WATCH

The European Commission, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT

Number 22

November 2005

PRESS LAY BARE THEIR EU BOOBS

More than halfway through the UK presidency of the European Union, major issues have confronted Europe's leaders - among them Turkish membership of the Union, the EU budget and the constitution. All of these are of direct interest to the British public. But many newspapers have a habitual preference for the trivial, misleading and untrue and over the past few months their readers have been treated to stories about buxom barmaids, bagpipes and tightrope walkers - all supposedly under threat from Brussels. This twenty-second edition of Press Watch highlights the continuing dangers of believing what you read in the newspapers.

TABLOIDS MAKE A BOOBOO

BY BLAMING EU FOR BARMAID COVER UP

Hands off our barmaids' boobs

The Sun 4 August 2005

The EU has declared a crackpot war on busty barmaids – by trying to ban them from wearing low-cut tops. Po-faced penpushers have deemed it a HEALTH HAZARD for bar girls to show too much cleavage. And in a daft directive that will have drinkers choking on their pints, Brussels bureaucrats have ordered a cover-up. They say barmaids run a skin cancer risk if they expose themselves to the sun when they go outside to collect glasses. Last night the move was blasted as an affront. Annie Powell, of real ale group Camra, raged: “It’s just another blatant example of Europe gone mad.”

Barmaids protest at probably the silliest directive in the world

The Daily Telegraph 3 August 2005

BAVARIAN barmaids are to be forced by a European Union directive to cover up, supposedly to protect them from sun. Brewery owners, politicians and most of the women themselves have condemned the legislation as absurd, claiming the “tan ban”, as it has been nicknamed, will destroy a centuries-old tradition.

Bavarian barmaids typically dress in a costume known as a “dirndl”, a dress and apron with a tight, low cut top whose figure-hugging effect is enhanced by a short white blouse. Under the EU’s Optical Radiation Directive, employers of staff who work outdoors, including those in Bavaria’s beer gardens, must ensure they cover up against the risk of sunburn. Bavarian bar keepers have been told that the dirndl, generally rather revealing, will have to be replaced as it offers no protection... “This is European law making at its most pedantic,” said Munich’s mayor, Christian Ude. “A waitress is no longer allowed to wander round a beer garden with a plunging neckline. I would not want to enter a beer garden under these conditions.”...

The directive was initially accused of outlawing bare-chested British builders. But Britain opted out of signing it, arguing that it was up to employees and employers to use their common sense to guard against the sun.

Bunch of boobies!

News of the World 7 August 2005

Ulrika Johnson column

THE RIDICULOUS EU want to ban barmaids from wearing revealing tops to protect them from sunburn while collecting glasses outside.

These titillating treatises of buxom barmaids baring more than just their pint trays was definitely a story for the silly season.

The Sun painfully missed the point with their "Save Our Jugs" campaign - the main aim of the proposals is to protect employees who are exposed, for example, to lasers or infrared lamps in their work and may be at risk of skin or retina damage.

Although the legislation *does* mention the potential hazards of working in strong sunshine, the idea was always that it was for bosses to decide whether workers were at risk from over-exposure to the sun, or other forms of natural or optical radiation. Despite the histrionics of tabloids and broadsheets alike, there was never any intent to tell barmaids what they can wear. The serious point is that in the UK alone 69,000 new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year.

How the risk to employees will be assessed, and what measures should be taken if there is deemed to be one, will be decided at national level – in the UK by the Health and Safety Executive.

QUÉ PASA, DOCTOR?

TABLOIDS SHOW CHRONIC SHORTAGE OF UNDERSTANDING

Danger of EU docs who cannot speak English

Daily Mirror 5 July 2005

Patients' lives are at risk because many EU doctors cannot speak English properly, it was claimed yesterday. The doctors' failure means they may interpret symptoms incorrectly. Under EU law they do not have to be tested in language skills. Now worried experts want a change in the law.

Doctors' poor English 'risks lives'

Daily Mail 5 July 2005

Patients' lives are being put at risk because thousands of doctors working in Britain have a poor command of English, experts warned yesterday. Medics from outside Europe are tested on their language skills before being accepted into the profession. But under an EU labour law ruling, doctors from Europe are exempt from the tests.

There is no EU law on language tests for doctors. While there is legislation to protect European workers from discrimination on the basis of their nationality, it is up to local health authorities and the British government to set essential recruitment criteria, including language requirements, for NHS staff. As the General Medical Council states, "The authority that employs the doctor must be satisfied their written and spoken English is satisfactory." If a doctor from another EU country meets these requirements, there is no reason why they should not be allowed to work in the UK.

BARMY ARMY STORY

GRIPPING TALE STOPS SHORT OF THE TRUTH

Trailer of damage

EU's brakes ruling costs army £21m

Sunday Mirror 26 June 2005

DEFENCE chiefs have been landed with a £21million bill to fit Army trailers with brakes – because they breach EC rules. Brussels bureaucrats are insisting on the change even though thousands of the trailers have been in use without problems since 1982... A senior Army source said: "It's true the trailers don't have brakes, but it doesn't matter. They are towed by other vehicles such as Land Rovers and as long as they are attached properly the risks are tiny... Another source said: "This beggars belief. It is complete madness and a disgrace."

The trailers are not in breach of EC rules, as there are no EC rules requiring the army to fit brakes on trailers in the first place. There are laws that aim to improve safety standards for all vehicles, including trailers, but it is up to individual member states to decide whether they are applied to the military, or to quote from EU legislation, whether "vehicles intended for use by the armed services" must comply. "Brussels bureaucrats" are not "insisting on the change" and so cannot be blamed for landing defence chiefs with the £21 million bill.

BAGPIPES AND (SEVERAL) OTHER GRIPES

A LOT OF WRONGNESS ABOUT CORRECTNESS

Wealth and Safety

The Sun 2 August 2005

THE SUN today exposes the “Health and Safety” madness which is taking over Britain...Dogs have fallen foul of the PC brigade in Bradford, West Yorks, where city officials banned butchers from selling dog bones. Council bureaucrats warned butcher John Smith he faced losing his licence if he carried on selling them. The edict was based on a new EU regulation for food storage...

Zealous officials ripped out a playground swing in Great Somerford, Wilts, because it was positioned too high according to new EU regulations...

Recently it emerged that new EU laws were set to force trapeze artists and tightrope walkers to wear safety helmets while performing. Charles O’Brine, from Fossett’s Circus, said: “Can you imagine a flying trapeze artist with a hard hat on?” The measure was due to be introduced under regulations affecting people working at great heights...

In Scotland, bagpipes recently faced the axe under rules to slash noise pollution. The EU proposal was intended to ban noises louder than 87 decibels...Officials have also targeted window cleaners and builders, claiming an EU directive required ladders to be securely anchored to the ground for safety reasons. The proposal meant that labourers would be banned from climbing a ladder while a mate held it steady.

The Sun’s initiative to, in its own words, “Make PC Lunacy History”, would stand a greater chance of succeeding if the examples it uses of “‘Health and Safety’ madness” were not complete nonsense.

Dog owners can still pick up a bone at the butchers. After the spread of mad cow disease, European health ministers took measures to prevent further outbreaks. Strict rules were introduced on the safe and traceable disposal of animal by-products (a major source of the disease's outbreak), outlawing meat unsafe for human consumption from entering the food chain. Butchers can only sell products that are suitable for humans to eat - the rest must be classified as waste. The rules do not stop a butcher supplying bones to individual dog owners for their pet’s consumption, provided the bone had not already been thrown away, i.e. classified as waste.

The swings story is not even correct in a roundabout sort of way. There are simply no EU regulations governing the height of playground equipment. The origin of this myth may have come from European Standard 1176-5, drawn up by the European Committee for Standardisation. This is a non-EU body made up of standards institutions from 28 countries, including the British Standards Institution. It sets guidelines for products in order to improve consumer safety, but these guidelines are entirely voluntary.

Also on the subject of height, the EU is not “set to force trapeze artists and tightrope walkers to wear safety helmets while performing”, nor will builders be barred from holding a ladder steady for a mate. Between 2003-2004, 67 people died in the UK as a result of a fall in the workplace. The new laws on working at height aim to protect workers by improving the safety equipment at their disposal, but it is up to national authorities – in the UK’s case the Health and Safety Executive – to devise the implementing measures. It would be up to the HSE to make trapeze artists don hard hats (though how that would protect them from a fall so high is anybody’s guess) and ban builders from holding ladders. So far, it has not felt inclined to take these steps.

As for banning bagpipes, Scots can rest assured that their favourite musical instrument is not under threat from EU proposals on noise pollution. While new measures will come into force next year, they are designed primarily for those who work with loud machinery for a sustained period – more than 87 decibels for eight hours in a row. The law, voted on by ministers and MEPs (including those from the UK), will from 2008 cover the entertainment industry, but will apply only to workers rather than audiences.

If, in the highly unlikely event a bagpipe player is hired to play continuously for eight hours, and the noise created averaged more than 87 decibels, the employer would be obliged to carry out a risk assessment to see where changes can be made – tinkering with the acoustics in a hall to reduce echoes, for example. If that fails, personal protection such as earmuffs will need to be considered, but only as a last resort. Banning musical instruments is not an option. Guarding against hearing loss and stress, which sustained exposure to loud noise has been proven to cause, is the only thing in the pipeline here.

CHUTNEY CHUTZPAH

TELEGRAPH GIVES WOMEN THE PICCALILLIS

WI in a pickle over safety

The Daily Telegraph 17 June 2005

To the many satisfied customers who buy Ann Doy's prized homemade piccalilli it does not matter where the ingredients have come from. It is the taste that counts. But Government officials, acting on European regulations, are determined that she, and thousands like her, must now account for every ingredient, insisting on them keeping receipts for a year for each item purchased. So, for her autumn chutneys this year, Mrs Doy will need to keep a record of the marrows grown in her father's garden, the runner beans and the green tomatoes from her own, the onions and courgettes from the farm shop and mustard and sugar she purchases from Tesco... Mrs Doy sells her chutneys alongside jams, cakes and savouries on offer at the weekly country market, run mainly by WI stalwarts...

Kath Turner, 62, a member of the local Loosley Row and Lacey Green WI, has been selling cakes at the stall for 20 years. "We haven't poisoned anyone yet, so where is the need for this," she said. "The WI has been selling homemade produce since 1919 and no one has died. It's so pointless. If I use something from my own garden I have to write a receipt out to myself." All the produce has the ingredients clearly listed. "We don't mind that. But to have a record of which apple came from which tree at the bottom of the garden is a nonsense."

Ann Doy and Kath Turner are not required by "EU regulations" to list every ingredient in their autumn chutneys and cakes. The same goes for keeping tabs on father's marrows. This is because Women's Institute fêtes and functions, where homemade products are generally sold loose or pre-packed, are exempt from EU food labelling laws, as are restaurants and sandwich bars. These measures were introduced (and voted on by all EU members including the UK) to help the 8% of children and 3% of adults who suffer from food allergies. Listing all the ingredients on packaged foods sold in supermarkets will enable them to avoid the reactions and often chronic illnesses that are caused, a point the *Telegraph* neglects to mention.

HYSTERIA OVER BACTERIA

LACK OF MATURITY IN CHEESY YARN

EU hygiene regulations threaten traditional French cheeses

The Sunday Telegraph 10 July 2005

Tucked into an alpine valley close to the Swiss border, the French village of Abondance appears to have come straight from a postcard: steep-roofed chalets, a 12th century abbey and a proud epicurean heritage. On the family farm, 73-year-old Céline Gagneux creates her speciality Vacherin d'Abondance cheese using milk from a small herd of cows, a breed developed by monks in the Middle Ages. For as long as anyone can remember, the women of the Gagneux family have produced the rounds of creamy cheese, wrapped in wood from local spruce trees. Thanks to Brussels bureaucrats, however, Mrs Gagneux will be the last... The Association Fromages de Terroir, a group set up to protect the 1,000 different cheeses traditionally made in France, says that at least 50 varieties have disappeared in the past 30 years and many more are on their way out. Véronique Richez-Lerouge, the association's president, blames draconian EU regulations for strangling the production of cheeses made with unpasteurised milk. "Of course there have to be hygiene standards but you can't produce cheese in a laboratory," she says. "Brussels says this or that is dangerous and encourages bacteria and France trembles and introduces the rules. It's an enormous problem."

It is difficult to see how "EU hygiene regulations threaten traditional French cheeses," given that those made from unpasteurised milk, like Mrs Gagneux's Vacherin d'Abondance, are exempt.

In order to limit the risk of salmonella and other forms of bacteria from contaminating food, health ministers and MEPs (including those from the UK) recently agreed new hygiene laws to improve food-handling standards. In recognition of the costs that small companies would face, the new measures contain a level of flexibility for traditional food processes and for food businesses located in remote areas. And cheese made from unpasteurised milk remains outside the scope of the new legislation.

Perhaps the state of the traditional French cheese industry, therefore, has more to do with something other than EU interference. As Mr Gagneux states later in the article, "My daughters don't want to do this because the work is too hard."

STILL NOT A VERY BRIGHT SPARK

BOOKER ARTICLE FAILS TO PLUG THE GAPS

The horse's mouth

Christopher Booker's Notebook

The Sunday Telegraph 31 July 2005

As part of the European Commission's latest evangelising drive, its London office has produced another edition of Press Watch, its long-running publication dedicated to exposing the terrible lies about the EU told by the British press... Among several stories from this column it tries to refute was one about the last Flying Fortress in Britain being grounded by an EU insurance directive, under which it would pay the same premiums as a commercial airliner. The Commission cannot deny the story but suggests that, if I could had checked with them, they could have told me that British ministers did not ask for an exemption for the bomber... Another item tries to deny any link between EU directive 98/34 and the Part P building regulations which have put many British electricians out of business this year. Apparently the directive "makes no mention whatsoever of electricians or electrical standards". Yet if they read its Annex 1 they would find, right at the top, a reference to "Cenelec", which sets electrical standards, as one of the bodies with whose standards national laws must now comply.

Christopher Booker is absolutely right. Had he checked with the Commission's London office, he would have discovered the facts: British ministers did not ask for an exemption for the Flying Fortress, from EU insurance legislation.

Mr Booker did spot that Cenelec is referred to in EU directive 98/34. But if only he had made that phone call he would have discovered that 1) Cenelec, or the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization, is not an EU body and its members include standards bodies from non-EU countries, 2) the standards it sets are voluntary and cannot be imposed on its members and 3) this legislation has nothing to do with British electricians. It instead sets up a system whereby European countries tell each other when they plan to introduce new technical regulations on industrial, agricultural and IT products. It is hoped that a better awareness of the regulations in force in each country will help facilitate trade. A similar awareness of the law might better inform Mr Booker's work.

EDITING DISORDER

ANSWER TO BURNING QUESTION

Now EU wants a commissioner for suntans

Evening Standard 21 June 2005

Employers could be forced to carry out "risk assessments" on the strength of the sun under proposals from Brussels to protect outdoor workers. Workers would receive training in how to limit their exposure to sunlight, while managers would have to record preventative steps taken by employees – such as wearing shirts and hats... Britain's one million outdoor workers would receive 20 minutes' training a year in how to reduce risks from sun exposure. Employers would be required to pay for the training, as well as assessing and controlling workers' exposure. The cost to industry would be £8 million over the next 10 years, according to the government assessment.

Firstly, the EU does not want a commissioner for suntans. The Commission's London office was left rather perplexed after reading this headline in the *Evening Standard*, especially since it bears little relation to the content of the article. The Standard offered the following explanation: "Clearly it was playing on our readers' perception that the European Commission seems to want a say in all aspects of our lives." With this sort of story it might to be asked where readers get their perceptions from in the first place.

LIVING IN A DIFFERENT AGE

EU PENSION GETS DODDERY DISSECTION

EU officials retire at 50... and you pay for it

Daily Express 17 August 2005

TAXPAYERS in Britain are having to fund a new Brussels gravy train which will see unelected Eurocrats retiring on massive pensions at 50. Under the crazy plan they will be able to leave on 65 per cent of their salaries – or up to £6,000 a month. Those who hang on until they are 55 can retire on a full salary... Shadow Foreign Secretary Liam Fox said taxpayers would be “appalled” at having to pay for this “Euro gravy train”. As Britain puts more into the EU than it takes out, it will be one of the small number of nations having to bear the brunt of the scheme. Under a European statute, officials older than 45 on May 1, 2004, or those who have been in office 20 years can opt to take early retirement 50. Those who simply cannot wait until their 50th birthday to retire can give up work at any time.

Scandal of EU parasites

Daily Express leader column 17 August 2005

The pensions industry is in crisis. Millions of us are living in fear of a poverty-stricken old age. And what is the reaction of the European Union officials, those self-selected, self-important meddlers who would seek to intrude into every aspect of our lives? They grant themselves massive pensions at 50 – an age when they are young enough to begin a second career. If ever there was an example of what a bloated and corrupt institution the EU has become, this is it. These people are leeches: gorging themselves on EU money and ensuring they will have a steady stream of the stuff for life. And who pays for this bonanza? The taxpayer – the same taxpayer who may have to work longer to fund someone else’s retirement. This grotesque scheme must be dropped now.

50: NEW EUROPEAN AGE OF HYPOCRISY

News of the World 21 August

William Hague column

The latest total misuse of your money by the unelected European Commission is to let bureaucrats retire at 50 on 65 per cent of their salaries. Not surprisingly, hundreds of them are jumping at the chance to do so. Meanwhile, millions across Europe are told they will have to work much longer for their pension. It does not inspire confidence in the EU that it is run by such a bunch of hypocritical wasters.

EU officials enjoying a luxurious lifestyle replete with inexplicable benefits, elaborate perks and gargantuan entitlements obviously had the press and some politicians frothing at the mouth. Yet if the officials mentioned in these stories were indeed to “hang on” until they are 55 to “retire on a full salary” then, under the pension formula worked out for European Commission staff, they would have had to have begun working at the age of five. For most employees who started out a little later in life, retiring early results in a substantial loss of income. A typical official retiring at 55 loses 28% of their pension entitlement.

While the European Commission does allow early retirement without loss of pension rights, it is offered only on a very limited basis – just 40 officials have been allowed to retire early in 2005 (out of a workforce of 22,000), and all had to be 55 or over – not 50.

This early retirement scheme is used by the Commission to make savings elsewhere. For example, the entry into the EU of 10 additional member states in 2004 meant that new staff had to be recruited to ensure that European institutions could continue to function effectively. Translation services, for instance, needed people who could speak the nine extra official languages that EU enlargement entailed. To keep a lid on budgets and staffing levels, 530 officials were given the option to retire without loss of rights. But only half of the vacant posts that arose were subsequently filled – this was a one-off exercise, not a one in, one out exercise. As a result, the taxpayer did not have pay a single extra penny.

Previous editions of Press Watch, Euromyths and general information about the European Commission’s Representation in the UK may be obtained via the internet on: <http://www.cec.org.uk>

Other useful links:	European Commission	http://europa.eu.int
	Virtual Press Room	http://europa.eu.int/comm/press_room
	European Parliament	http://www.europarl.eu.int
	European Court of Justice	http://europa.eu.int/cj
	Council of the European Union	http://ue.eu.int
	Court of Auditors	http://www.eca.eu.int