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As we approach the final Christmas of the European Parliament's eighth legislature, the fifth since I became MEP, I have been reflecting on the past four and half years, and in recognition of the festive season, I have included a photograph of my local staff, from Christmas 2016.



First and foremost, I would like to thank my current staff, Diane Belk (Constituency Manager and Personal Assistant), Marc Hooper (Press Officer and Assistant Office Manager) and Andrea Marinoni (Accredited Parliamentary Assistant in the European Parliament). I would also like to thank Lauren McGreal, who was my Office Manager and Personal Assistant until she left my employment in June 2017 (to take up a position in the Human Resources Department at the University of Bath). I am indebted to them and grateful for all the help and support they have given me.

The time I have spent as MEP has been most informative, often entertaining, fun and always very busy. The first two years being particularly hectic owing to the number of by-elections I helped to campaign in (four in the first six months, notably Clacton and Rochester and Strood). I have enjoyed the experience and am lucky to have made good friends amongst my fellow MEPs and EFDD group colleagues.

In the 2015 General Election I stood in the Chippenham Constituency for the second time, coming third and increasing my vote share to 10%, thus saving my deposit.

As a founding member of UKIP, and having campaigned for a "No" Vote in the 1975 referendum on the UK's membership of the Common Market, the most memorable event of my mandate has been the EU Referendum and the British people voting to leave the European Union on the 23rd of June 2016.



As you know, the campaign was a long and hard one. In the South West we began campaigning earnestly in September 2015 when we met up with Rupert Matthews, from the "Better Off Out" campaign (set up by Simon Richards, Chief Executive of the Freedom Association), in Devizes. During the months of campaigning, Rupert, Simon and I often shared a platform at a number of meetings, where we put our respective cases to the public as to why we believed Britain should leave the EU, and we have remained good friends ever since. Throughout the 2016 EU Referendum campaign we also worked alongside other groups, such as Grassroots Out, Leave.eu and Vote Leave.



As an MEP representing the South West Counties and Gibraltar, one of the most pleasurable experiences has been travelling to Gibraltar for their National Day on 10th September, which commemorates Gibraltar's first sovereignty referendum, held in 1967, where the people voted overwhelmingly to remain British. My only hope is that their wish to remain British will be honoured by the UK government now and in the future.

Finally, as only four months remain until the UK is scheduled to leave the EU, my euphoria on the 24th June 2016, when after 41 years of my campaigning for the UK to exit the European Union 17.4 million people voted to leave, has been replaced by despondency. At the time, when people asked me what I would do when I was no longer MEP, my reply was always to say "celebrate!"

However, as the months have passed this joyful scenario has faded as it would appear that the biggest exercise in democracy, where more people voted than at any time in our history, is about to be betrayed.

