I turn up pretty regularly to Committee votes in Brussels. I don’t kid myself that I can make a huge difference. I expect to be out-voted by the inbuilt pro-integration, pro-regulation, pro-climate-change majority. But sometimes votes are fairly evenly balanced, and a single vote can make a difference. On the Industry/Energy Committee, naturally I vote in what I conceive to be the best interests of my constituents and of our country in the interest of business and industry and growth and prosperity (and before we start on the howls of outrage – he’s pro-business! – let’s just remember that it’s business and industry that provide the jobs and the goods and the services we all rely on, and pay the taxes that fund our health, education and so on).

But while MEPs on the Committee can table amendments, I rarely do so, because first of all there is already a huge range of amendments to support or oppose (probably too many), and secondly I know that if I table a good, red-blooded euro-sceptic climate-realist amendment, it will simply be voted down and I’ll have wasted my time.

Nevertheless, just now and again, I decide to toss in a few grenades, partly to vent my frustration with the system, but also to expose others on the Committee to a rare dose of common sense (or as they might see it, to make trouble).

Recently we had a vote on the European steel industry (and – don’t laugh – what the EU should do to help it). The EU produced 169 million tons of steel in 2012, though this is dwarfed by China’s figure of 716 million tons. I am informed by industry sources that a ton of steel manufactured in China causes double the CO₂ emissions of the same ton made in Europe (if you’re worried about CO₂ emissions).

European steel makers are having an increasingly tough time in Europe with onerous regulation coupled with high energy prices (and we’re getting a similar story from other energy intensive industries like chemicals, glass, aluminium, refining). So the effect will be to drive steel production offshore, taking its jobs and investment and tax revenues with it. And it will very likely produce more emissions rather than less. We’ve damaged our economy and increased emissions at the same time. This is perverse. It’s a lose-lose deal.

The proposal we debated was all about good wishes, hope and expectation, with almost no substantive content. So I tossed in a handful of amendments setting out the real nature of the problem, including a series of deletions of climate-related nonsense.

Then I sat and voted, waiting for my amendments to crash and burn. But to my astonishment, one seemed to slip through on a show of hands. It read Whereas we see that EU environment and energy policy creates a difficult business environment for the iron and steel industry, in particular raising the price of energy and making EU manufacture uncompetitive on the global market.

Simply a statement of what John Cleese called The Bleedin’ Obvious, you may think. But the Greens were having none of it. Mr. Reinhard Bättikofer (sic), a German Green MEP, leapt into the fray. (If you were casting a production of Alice in Wonderland, you might want to consider Mr. Bättikofer for Tweedledum. Or Tweedledee). He demanded electronic verification of a result which he no doubt found incredible. And indeed it was confirmed, by about 20 to 15, as I recall. Hard cheese, Mr. Bättikofer. Sometimes the truth hurts.
I never expected to win it, but we did, and it’s a good feeling. We mustn’t count chickens, and we still have a lot of work to do, but I suspect we may enjoy the same feeling at the euro-elections on May 22nd next year.

Roger Helmer MEP