

Press Statement From Janice Atkinson, MEP, Vice President of the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group in the European Parliament, and senior UK MEP on the EU-US Delegation Committee

Slams “Twisted and Cynical” Brussels Politics Around Plans For Unholy Alliance of Populists And Federalists - Says UKIP Needs New Home In European Parliament

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Janice Atkinson has accused the European Parliament’s chief Brexit negotiator, Guy Verhofstadt, of “twisted and cynical politics which set a new low even by the standards of the European Parliament” after the Belgian federalist welcomed discussions with Italy’s populist MEP’s from the Five Star Movement (5SM) Party for possible inclusion into his ALDE liberal group in the European Parliament - only to reject them days later.

Bepe Grillo wanted to move 5SM away from their previous European Parliament grouping, the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) where they sat with UKIP.

A key effect of any shift would immediately be to threaten more than £2 million of Brussels funding currently received by UKIP. Removing the 5SM MEPs from the EFDD would mean that the grouping, now with just 27 members, was left hovering perilously close to the threshold of 25 members which EU rules say constitutes the minimum number required to form a recognised EU group eligible for funding.

If the 5SM were to leave the bonds holding together the remaining group – which includes 20 UKIP MEPs - are extremely fragile. Many believe that it would shortly fall below the 25 minimum memberships required. That would cost a cash-strapped UKIP, which has recently been plagued by leadership battles, divisive fall-outs and even physical fights, around £2 million.

Atkinson, MEP for South East England said:

“This calculated and despicable manoeuvring by Mr Verhofstadt and his federalist cronies is a patent attempt to bolster his presidential credentials, where he is standing for election to take over the Presidency of Martin Schulz. By rejecting the 5SM at this time, shows he is playing tough. He’s playing to the MEP electorate.

“I say this isn’t over yet. Wait until after next week’s Strasbourg session when the Parliament elects a new President, then I predict this unholy alliance will be back on ALDE’s agenda.

“The natural home for the 5SM members was with the Greens since much of their populist appeal is based on Green as well as populist, anti-EU policies. But the Greens in the EP refused to accept Grillo’s MEPs.

“The only sensible course now for UKIP, to avoid this type of blackmail in the future, is to look to negotiate its entry to our ENF group, which includes the heavyweight anti-federalist figures including Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders. UKIP knows they will never be welcomed by the Conservative grouping in the EP, not least because three-quarters of UK Tories in the MEP were anti-Brexit.

“We are happy in the ENF to discuss such an entry any time UKIP decides its spiritual home is with us as the authentic grouping of Europe’s people’s parties.

I know that most sensible UKIP members do realise and understand that the ENF represents the new reality of politics both in Europe and the USA.

“Quite apart from securing its funding and voice in the last years of British membership of the EP, joining the ENF will give UKIP a voice in the crucial trade negotiations with the USA on a post-Brexit trade deal.

“Donald Trump’s EU ambassador-in-waiting, Ted Malloch, is a fervent Brexiteer and has already said he believes the UK should be entitled to expect a good deal with the USA.

“As the most senior UK MEP on the EU-USA delegation (there are no UKIP members), I believe it would be perverse for UKIP not to want have its voice heard as members of the ENF in that negotiating process with our friends in Washington.”

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