

Grassroots for Europe Round Table #54 - 8th April 2025



<https://grassrootsforeurope.org/the-round-table/>

Simon Saunders - Introducing the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Europe (19 May 2025).

SUMMARY REPORT

Simon Saunders is the political engagement and communications manager for the European Movement UK in which role he offers support to the All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Europe. He has worked on UK-EU relations for nearly a decade, with experience in the European Parliament, the 2016 referendum campaign and maintaining pro-European connections within the Conservative party. He is now, together with his colleague Joe Meighan, a member of the team at European Movement UK which acts as the secretariat for the APPG on Europe

Launched late last year, the APPG has approaching 100 members from across the parties and from both Houses of Parliament. There are more Peers than MPs and more Conservative Peers than Conservative MPs. It has proved easier to recruit peers and Liberal Democrat MPs. It is planned to publish the membership list when there are about 100 or more members. The declared aim of the APPG is to keep parliamentarians engaged with the UK's future relationship with the EU through structured dialogue and by connecting MPs with policy experts and European diplomats. It seeks to fill the scrutiny gap left by the dissolution of the European

Scrutiny Committee. It has held evidence sessions on UK-EU cooperation and foreign policy. There are plans to send a delegation to Brussels and for future activities to focus on specific policy areas such as emissions trading, professional mobility and science cooperation. A recent evidence session concentrated on these topics and a report on its recommendations is being prepared. Discussions have also been held around a European youth mobility scheme with the EU which would be viewed as mutually beneficial rather than as a UK concession.

The APPG is open to hearing evidence on UK-EU relations from citizens' groups and offers help in facilitating connections between interested organisations and parliamentarians.

UK-EU Data Adequacy Agreement Update

Whilst the agreement is expected to be renewed, there is some nervousness about the process, particularly from the European Parliament. This agreement is of great importance both for security reasons and for data sharing. So far, tech policy alignment has not been a major focus in discussions but it will almost certainly become more relevant in the future.

The Impact of Brexit on Tariffs and EU-UK Summit.

Simon agreed with the suggestion that the [relatively low] 10% tariff imposed by the US has more to do with the UK's net export status than with Brexit. The APPG is working on a briefing on tariffs and Simon stressed the importance of combatting the narrative that lower tariffs are a result of Brexit. In response to a question about the APPG's priorities for the up-coming EU-UK summit, Simon said significant announcements were to be expected, including a partnership agreement along the lines of the recently agreed EU-Norway Agreement and a deeper partnership agreement for structured foreign security and defence cooperation. There is also potential for participation in European defence procurement initiatives, with a financial contribution from the UK.

UK-EU Relations Strengthening Through the APPG

The APPG seeks to respond to a growing interest from MPs across parties in improving UK-EU relations with a focus on areas such as security, defence and professional mobility. Although it recognises that progress may need to be incremental, the APPG is keen to encourage grassroots activities and suggests the 2019 Political Declaration as a starting point when discussing closer UK-EU relations with Conservatives. In conclusion, the APPG is in the process of developing its structure and processes, with the hope of being a useful forum for advancing UK-EU cooperation.

Q&A

Chair [Colin Gordon]: Could you say something about relations and contacts between the APPG for Europe and the EU institutions in London - the European Parliament Liaison office and the EU delegation, both based at Europe House?

Simon Saunders: They've both sent representatives to our evidence sessions. They've been fully engaged and briefed on what's going on. The EU Ambassador spoke at the APPG launch. So we've got particularly good relations with both offices. And when we travel to Brussels, the European Parliament Liaison Office is heavily involved with helping organize our logistics.

More widely the European Movement team in which I work has had close relations with them.

All the EM staff team went to Europe House and sat down with all the representatives from the Ambassador's office. So we're closely connected. We are strengthening those links as we go. But I'd say that they're quite good at the moment, and we're pleased about that.

Chair: Could you tell us more about the membership of the APPG?

Simon Saunders: Our numbers are in the high eighties, I would say at the moment. It's been easier to recruit peers than MPs, and far easier to get Tory peers than sitting Tory MPs. We have a few sitting Tory MPs signed up as members. So that's

good, and once the total gets to 100, we plan to publish the list. There are quite a few LibDem MPs, including James McCleary, their lead spokesperson on Europe. I'll be happy to circulate the membership list afterwards.

Other active members include Nicholas Soames, Lord Soames, from the Conservative side; Caroline Voaden (LibDem); Marsha de Cordova, co-chair of the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly; Claire Hanna, from the SDLP in Northern Ireland.

Chair: You mentioned grassroots organisations being one of the areas that the group would welcome input. Would it be possible to put some of our local and campaign groups in touch with APPG members in their locality, or who share a topic of interest?

Simon Saunders: Yes. There was Westminster Hall debate on rejoining the European Union a couple of weeks ago with a number of speakers there, including some from the Labour Party.

John Gaskell: Do you think that the new intake of MPs is more likely to be a member of the APPG, to be pro-European, and to be less traumatized by Brexit?

Simon Saunders: My instinct is to say yes. The referendum was a long time ago. Now I think there is certainly a more forward looking mentality. My colleague, Joe Meigan, who I work on the APPG used to be with the Labour Movement for Europe, which sponsored a fair number of the new Labour intake.

I know there is a considerable cohort of of pro-Europeans within the new Labour cohort and in the Tory party – that is to say, at least in relative terms, relative to where we are now. But it's still a pretty mixed bag. From my side of the Conservative party, the One Nation, pro-European side, we're not too despondent in the sense that all sides of the party have been weakened. So we sense maybe a degree of optimism there within the Tory party, there was a a new young Tory MP saying that she supported remain, so I think there is hope even within the Tory party. I would say on the Labour side of the younger cohort, there is a sense that we'll focus on more

practical issues for now, on how we can strengthen cooperation.

But as my purely personal view, what Labour have proposed is not particularly ambitious, and I think there is a danger - leaving aside security and defence for a second, because I think we know there will be progress there - on the economic side there is a danger that it just stalls; because the gains will be so little economically, is that worth paying any political price in terms of provoking Brexiter opposition? I'm not saying there isn't an answer to that, but I think that is also a live issue.

Lillian and Tony McCobb: Has Trump given the APPG greater urgency or impetus?

Simon Saunders: In more broad terms, on security in all its forms, security, foreign affairs security and defence cooperation, yes absolutely. And that's why our Co-Chair Rosena Allin-Khan went out to Brussels a couple of weeks ago, particularly to discuss these issues with her European counterparts, and I think, as we get closer to the summit, the APPG is hoping to see some tangible outcomes, and it was for that reason that we held the evidence session last week.

Part of my job this week is to write up a report on that, with some key recommendations which they can promote between now now and the summit, relating notably to foreign security and defence cooperation. I don't know if the priorities have changed since the Trump tariffs, I'm not sure if we yet know what effect that might have on the trading relationship at this stage.

Paul Browne: Following up on the Trump question, is the UK-US Trade deal being discussed? Is there an awareness among the APPG members and are they actively talking to other Parliamentarians about the danger that any Trump deal that could be agreed, could actually interfere with the UK-EU reset, particularly on standards, whether that's on digital services or on food, in ways that could interfere with a deal with the EU in future.

The second question is on the youth mobility scheme, and I appreciate that that is not the same as freedom of movement for young people. It's a kind of elevated visa

scheme. Essentially, it still requires a visa, even if it's more generous than most. My worry about that is that it will probably be part of the reset, the Government may well agree to it, I suspect they will, but it's more about how that's going to be presented, because my worry is that, as you often see in discussions about freedom of movement, it'll be presented as something we had to agree to get things done, as a price and a cost, and we even see in polling the phrasing freedom of even youth mobility as a cost and something that actually decreases support for a reset. Are there discussions going on within the APPG or with other parliamentarians about whether to try to persuade ministers to sell youth mobility in a more positive way, so we escape falling into that trap of having to defend something which we actually should be advocating.

Andrew Hesselden (SaveFOM): I'd certainly echo that.

Simon Saunders: Recently the language has changed. It's now called a youth opportunity scheme, and everyone the APPG has been speaking to feels quite confident that some agreement will be reached. What exactly that looks like we're still not sure but, as many people know, a lot of the pushback has come from from the Home Office. But it looks like things are going in the right direction. The arguments that we are going to be putting forward and are trying to put is that it's in both our interests. The youth mobility scheme is not something that we've got to concede to get what we want to have. The APPG has spoken about this to different sorts of trade organizations. For example, the Law Society are keenly interested in the scheme because there was a practice before Brexit where young lawyers would go to Europe, for I think a year before or shortly after their training to get experience, and that's been hugely beneficial. The horticultural sector would send interns to the Netherlands for six months, and that was hugely beneficial for them and for their companies. So we are trying to push this, and we will frame it as mutually beneficial and highlight the opportunities for British young people, how it unlocks opportunities that they can then exploit going forward.

So that's how I think we're trying to position it. But obviously any comments from this group would be hugely welcome.

On your second question, on the impact of trade: the APPG hasn't particularly got too much stuck into trade at this at this point, so we've had the few introductory sessions, and then we've gone to foreign security and defence policy. And we looked at the SPS agreement specifically, but in terms of the broader picture, looking at the US potential trade deal and the impact on the reset, no, I think that is something we should be looking. We'll be looking in the future. The line that we're trying to promote, particularly on the tariffs. Is that it's now a double whammy: we've got these tariffs from the US, and now we've also got the the trade friction from being outside the single market.

Chair: Thank you on the trade thing. Something that we we hope to be sharing with the stakeholders in the next days is our report of last month's session. 4 weeks ago, when we had friends in from Best for Britain who talked us through the report that they'd commissioned by Frontier Research and and some pollsters. This may be already very familiar to to you, Simon. They published and launched in Westminster and and spoke to the Business and Trade Committee about research on possible ways to make more progress without infringing Starmer red lines than was thought previously possible in terms of notions about deep and dynamic alignment of regulation, and that seemed to be catching the interest of some parliamentarians like Liam Byrne who chairs that Committee.

We saw on the on the video some interesting fencing between Daniel Hannan and Tom Brufatto about what's possible through those various routes. So that's an interest been pursued by our friends at Best for Britain, and I imagine there'll probably be some point where they will be talking, or they have been talking to the APPG.

Simon Saunders: Yes, a lot of the APPG members I know attended that launch in Parliament as well as that presentation.

Cecilia Jastrzemska: Thanks very much for the presentation, Simon. That was a really useful update. The APPG launch was really good and well attended. I co-chair the EU-UK Stronger Together network of about 125 youth organizations linked up by

the British Council and European Commission, which could give evidence and contribute very meaningfully to the work of the APPG, I think, very given its wealth and depth of experience in youth campaigning and advocacy.

Simon Saunders: Please contact me or Joe Meighan. We're still looking at a series of evidence sessions. We can also quite quickly organize a policy-specific round table. If there's an idea, for a youth opportunity, or youth mobility scheme, we can discuss that and try and help. We could bring various people around the table, a group of MPs and peers, to discuss it in detail and flesh out what that might look like. Perhaps after the summit depending what comes out? Then we can look to do something after that, perhaps. But I think it's a great idea, and something we can absolutely engage with.

Richard Morris: I'd like to push you a bit further on the whole Trump question and the upcoming summit. This is just such an enormous game changer that everything one's been thinking about in terms of the reset is now thrown into a completely different context. It impacts on both defence and trade, and our entire relations between the UK and the EU. I don't see how the UK can really reset its relations with Europe if it's getting a special deal from Trump, a reduced tariff rate. And there are probably more divide and rule type tactics like this to come. And I want to know whether the APPG is seriously addressing this, whether it believes that Starmer's current posture of trying to please everybody can possibly work; and what pro-Europeans in Parliament really think is the right position for the UK in the light of this Trump situation.

Simon Saunders: We're still building the APPG in terms of building the community.

Richard Morris: We need to move on, because this is happening very fast.

Simon Saunders: Yes but bear in mind it's a cross party group. So there will be very different views and it has to be parliamentarian-led. We don't dictate to the APPG. We have to follow what the officers want to do. We can make suggestions, and we

can influence and initiate things to a degree. But it's parliamentarian-led. First and foremost, we focused on security. I appreciate it's moving fast, and that's why we're trying to get things out before the summit and we will. A briefing is being prepared on tariffs at the moment. But there's a lot of Labour MPs now that don't want to stick their head above the parapet. Conservatives have got their own problems. We we can do so much in terms of the briefing and raising awareness through the APPG ; we can't force them to take positions or do things.

We're very happy to share briefings and circulate them to the APPG, or try and suggest lines to take, or why this is better than that. But it is Parliamentarian-led. We've got a Labour government, and we've got a Labour co-chair, and I think we have to be sensitive and realistic about that.

Dr Monica Horten: My area is tech policy and online safety. And I am on the Council of Europe committee for online safety and user empowerment. And just last week I came back from the meeting in Paris with that committee. So I just wanted to pick up on a couple of things. One thing that you mentioned was the data adequacy, agreement with the EU. I and just wondered if you have any information on the status of that, and what's happening? Because that obviously, is something very important for UK for business, amongst other things.

With regard to the security cooperation deal that you're focusing on, obviously for very good reasons, is there any awareness of the importance of tech policy alignment as a requirement for getting the security and cooperation deal - alignment particularly of data protection will be a vital element of that? And I would suggest in the current environment AI comes into that, and the EU has an AI Act, and we appear to have dropped our plans for an AI law. So I just wondered if you have any insights into that, and whether this is an area that the APPG would consider addressing over the coming months.

Simon Saunders: Lord Kirkhope, the APPG Co-Chair, when he was in the European Parliament was involved in drafting GDPR and PNR [Passenger name

recognition]. So this is very much his area, and he maintains an interest in this, particularly regarding the data adequacy decisions.

The Commission has granted two data adequacy decisions to the UK. One under the GDP, and one under the Law Enforcement Directive. We're the only third country to have the Law Enforcement Directive which means we can share criminal data to a degree. We've lost access to the Schengen information system and other databases, and we don't have real-time access now. But criminal data does still flow.

The Commission has a number of data adequacy decisions with third countries. The UK is the only one with a sunset clause, to my knowledge, and that reflects the lack of trust between both sides at the time, and so that needs to be renewed in a couple of months time. I had always taken it was a given and it will be absolutely fine that they'll renew it. But actually speaking from some officials from the Commission, there was a nervousness.

I think it will be renewed. But they're not quite sure how it will be renewed, if that makes sense. There was more nervousness in the last few weeks than there has been ever since I've been speaking about this issue; and it's a huge issue, as you know.

Dr Monica Horten: I'm not sure. Are they thinking about the Data Bill that's before Parliament at the moment, because I understand that's got quite a few controversial amendments in it that would certainly weaken UK GDPR? And that might cause a problem.

Simon Saunders: Yes. We haven't got to the bottom of the issue as yet. My understanding was that it was something to do with the EU internal processes for for granting the decision, but it could be that as well. You could be absolutely right.

I think most people know also that part 7 of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, on policing and judicial cooperation, basically relies on this data adequacy recognition. So it is so important, though less critical today. That was all underpinned by adherence to the ECHR, so these were live issues in relation to Ireland, not with this government, but they but they were very much so before.

We do try and keep on top of data adequacy, and we will try and pursue it further. But if you're interested in this area, let me know. Lord Kirkhope sees this as his area, and we're very happy to discuss that further. To your second question on tech, to be completely honest, in the evidence session we've held and the conversations we've had, it has not particularly come up. So that's not something we've been thinking about, perhaps, as much as we should.

Chair: Helen Johnston from **Bremain in Spain** asks whether the door might be open in the committee for some evidence and representations from citizens and citizens groups. We happen to be having some conversations already about, about whether we might provide a different kind of platform for EU citizens to make their voice heard about issues relation to UK and Europe. They have very powerful organizations like the 3 million who work specifically on rights issues. They are a charitable organization which isn't able to get involved in campaigning to stop Brexit, for example. But they do a fine job in their area. People are asking whether the 3, 4, 5 million who are here for for keeps probably could have new ways of being heard. Maybe that's something that APPG might be able to find time to listen to. [Postscript: there ia also an APPG, supported by The New Europeans, focussing specifically on citizens' rights issues. <https://neweuropeans.uk/2024/12/18/our-appg-for-eu-citizens-in-uk-and-britons-abroad-to-relaunch>].

Simon Saunders: the answer is yes; we are glad to help in any area we think we can be useful, and the Secretariat is open to talk to any groups representing particular sectoral interests who would like to contact us. We can then always send a notice around the APPG membership, and it might be, that they want to contact you about the issue. APPG members have various different interests across across the board, so it might be that a couple of members will then come to us and say we can arrange a meeting for you, or we can arrange a smaller meeting with a select group of MPs. So anything like that, we're very happy to to circulate it on any organization's behalf, If if that's helpful.

Chris Hammond: I'm chair of the European Movement's Education Working Group. We see great potential in cooperating with the work of the EPLO and EEAS in London. We are interested in supporting and connecting to their Ambassador Schools programme here. We are also aware of their work with the network of European Affairs Societies at the universities. Along with getting the UK back into Erasmus+, one of our key goals is getting more about EU and more content on Europe, European democracy and citizenship into the UK schools curriculum. We would appreciate an opportunity to brief and consult the APPG on these matters.

Simon Saunders: That should certainly be possible. We can relatively easily organize events in Parliament, whether it is a briefing or whatever, and these things are quite straightforward to do. Though it can be difficult to try and get a group together, even when organizing this delegation to Brussels. It's trying to find a date that works for the most amount of people. It's quite challenging, actually, one of the biggest challenges of it all, to be honest.

Peter Burke: Just to bring us back to Trump and and the tariffs, we're hearing quite a lot in the popular press that this is a vindication of Brexit, that the UK is now benefiting from a lower rate of tariffs. And of course, that's to some extent Trump's game. But actually, the 10% rate had nothing to do with being given favourable status. It's very much more to do with the fact that we're not net exporters to the US in terms of goods, but I'd be interested in your comments on how we should combat that particular narrative? And are there particular arguments that you would use to oppose it?

Simon Saunders: Thank you. We are working on a briefing on tariffs at the moment. I did some work with Caroline Lucas over the weekend. I've got 2 hats on here, the APPG support role, and working for the European Movement more generally. Caroline Lucas was on Trevor Phillips on Sky on Sunday, and she came across quite strongly. We're still refining these arguments at the moment, but the key thing is that she almost rejects the premise of the question. It's ridiculous, isn't it, given that we

know we'd be far better off inside the European Union with high US tariffs than we would outside with a 10% US tariff and all the non-tariff barriers that we've got at the moment. So it's how we make that argument.

We're in the process of refining this all at the moment, because, if you want to be technical about it, some of the modelling of GDP loss since since we left the EU will be slightly different now because of the tariffs. But I think that overarching argument still, of course, absolutely stands.

We will have something on the tariffs shortly that I can circulate to this group, because I don't think we want to go down the route of trying to prove, or 10% tariff has got this impact, 20% would have this impact and getting bogged down on the figures, and you're being dragged into the Brexiteers territory of talking about how we've got less tariffs because we left the EU: there's absolutely a way we need to say the best option is being part of the EU.

Mark Johnston: The bilateral summit is roughly 6 weeks away. What do you see as the priorities for the APPG. In terms of of constructive outcomes there. Maybe the top 3 items, if it's possible to put it that way? What they hope to see, and what they can potentially influence between now and then.

Simon Saunders: I think the UK particularly has built up this summit as as a key moment. So I think there'd be huge disappointment if there's not significant announcements made, I think largely it will be they'll agree to agree.

I think the top thing that we're expecting would be some partnership agreements, maybe along the lines of the recently agreed EU Norway agreement which formalizes foreign security and defence cooperation. So there's low hanging fruit within that.

So within the security and defence pact, so that would certainly be a framework participation agreement, which means we can join PESCO projects again. Joint CSDP missions again, as we did in Bosnia, or more foreign-affairs type missions. So reintegration into that, or an agreement to reintegrate, should we want to.

And then an administrative agreement which would allow us to join PESCO projects. There's about 60-odd projects that we could join, in areas like military mobility, so

you can move troops across borders more easily - logistics, hubs and that thing. So we'd like to see specific tangible outcomes for formal defence cooperation. I think that's probably at the top of the agenda. And then with that, an agreement to agree, a deeper partnership agreement which will formalize structured foreign security and defence cooperation. All of that being packaged in the security pact. That is certainly the top area, I would say. If we can get some agreement in there, we will then be able to participate in the European Union defence procurement initiatives, or at least some of them, particularly Rearm Europe. And then we're still waiting to see with the other bits and pieces. There is a danger that there's going to be disagreements over fisheries again. But to what degree that is overblown we're not sure. We hope things don't stall over that.

Mark Johnston: The new procurement thing is quite a big money ticket.

Simon Saunders: Exactly. And third countries that have got partnership agreements, or some of them depending on the agreement, can participate already, so we would expect to see participation in some of that. It might be there'd be a financial contribution from the UK in order to be back in part of some of these mechanisms. But we would expect, or hope to see, movement in that area. And then we know Labour put in their manifesto a better deal for creative industries. I think, although it's a really important issue, I'm not sure that's top of the agenda at the moment, with what's going on, and the difficulty in agreeing. So I think that might take a bit of a back seat.

We'd expect to see hopefully something on youth opportunity/mobility, and we know the Government has been working on the SPS agreement. That won't be agreed by then, but will the broad outline be announced? Possibly. Security and defence is the top one, for sure.

The government has really built up this summit, so I think they feel they'd have failed if they don't get some of these things. It won't be that the details will all be agreed then, it will be agreement in principle.

A bit of background information: [the Europe minister] Nick Thomas-Symonds asked us to hold our roundtable session on the plant and animal health SPS agreement, to help help get industry views on record. That's an example of where we can be helpful to the government sometimes.

Chair: Simon, you made a telling remark earlier on about the fact that there is the APPG, but there is really no Select Committee for UK EU relations, and this is a big drop from the level of activity in Committees of the Lords and Commons while Brexit was actually happening. You've got to say that government's done a brilliant job in shutting down subversive debate in Westminster about so much of this that hasn't been wanted to be discussed very much by a couple of major parties. So you're taking on a huge challenge. There's a huge appetite for exploring, opening up a whole range of these issues. And you've been most encouraging and forthcoming about the possibilities.

Simon Saunders: As everyone in this group knows, if you're involved in UK-EU relations, people think that's just one subject. But , once you get into it, as we all know, it's everything, from education to fisheries to trade. It covers the whole spectrum of activity.

Chair: We're hoping that this is a sign of a change in the climate, and a change in the mood, in Parliament about European matters, There ws the debate of 40 or 50 MPs who spoke in Westminster Hall the other day. And quite a few of them were were remarkably freely spoken about what they were hoping to see that we aren't seeing at the moment. Do you sense there's a change in climate on the back benches, on either side?

Simon Saunders: The short answer is, yes, I think there is. I think, this Parliament unsurprisingly, is much easier than it was before the danger of Reform. Whether that's a true or imagined danger, I think it is very real for the Government, and very real for the Labour Party, more so in the Labour Party than the Conservative party is my feeling.

We can help the Government to be bold in its resets and realise it's not a vote loser to be strengthening cooperation with the European Union. That I sense is something that we need to work on. That's why, really what we want to produce here is something really practical. Sometimes it might be quite boring, particularly in the early stages, practical, evidence-based recommendations to strengthen cooperation. We want to try and do the small stuff now, to lay the groundwork for the bigger things further down the line. I think it's recognized that it's got to be a step by step approach – much, we know, to the disappointment of some of us. But I think that's widely recognized. It's about how we can make sure it stays on the agenda, and put forward these recommendations on how things can be improved.

Jo Pye: Campaigners would value advice from the APPG on messages that have impact with the public. So we are particularly interested in how do we get through to those Conservatives who could be swayed back into the fold, who may have perhaps said, oh, well, it's happened now, and that's in the past, and we're not personally affected.

Simon Saunders: It's a difficult question. It's something that I've worked on for a number of years. What I would say is that if you look at the Political Declaration which was agreed in 2019, alongside the Withdrawal Agreement, by Boris Johnson and Lord Frost, it's not particularly long, I think it's about a 12 page document, but it's very good. And it's very ambitious. Obviously, it's not the Single Market or the Customs Union. But actually, it sets out an ambition for a much more comprehensive relationship than we have now. So if I'm speaking to Conservatives, I refer them to this document that was agreed by Boris Johnson and Lord Frost, and by the Tory party, and what we're calling for is to implement what Boris Johnson and Lord Frost agreed.

So how can you have a problem with that? We're calling for what Johnson and Frost agreed, so that surely that should be fine and then I think the security and the defence arguments are the easiest ones with Tories, because you don't get into issues around the ECJ and sovereignty. So that's probably the opening way into the

conversion, I think.

And then I think if you're looking at specific changes, professional mobility is a huge issue for a lot of people. It's huge, I know, for the banking sector. I know if younger people come from Frankfurt to London, they're told not to answer phone calls anymore, because they're unclear in terms of what type of business they can do: can they talk to a client when they're abroad, can they not? So I think questions around professional mobility could be quite good with Tories. You know the history, the EU began with reduction of trade barriers, and then the single market, which we all know was where most Conservatives traditionally are. As a starting point, and as a reference point of what we want to achieve, I would look at the Political Declaration.

Chair: Lilian McCobb and Tony McCobb ask: Is there a role for the Lib Dems in the APPG? We know that you mentioned that James McCleary, who is their Europe lead, is on the APPG.

Simon Saunders: Absolutely yes. Wera Hobhouse is one of our vice-chairs. She is Liberal Democrat MP for Bath. We work quite closely with her, and she's hopefully going to lead on all the energy and emissions, carbon trading, and related issues. She sits on the relevant Select Committee.

The Lib Dems are the largest contingent on the APPG so far, which will probably not come as a surprise to many people. But I think, given the size of the Liberal Democrat party in Westminster now, they're hugely important in helping to raise all this.

Chair: We know you also work with the Conservative European Forum. Could you update us on what they're doing?

Simon Saunders: A key part of their strategy now is to try and rebuild the parliamentary caucus, because the likes of Stephen Hammond, Damian Green, Robert Buckland, the more one-nation, pro-European group either didn't win at the last election, or chose not to stand. So I think a top priority is building the

parliamentary caucus again, even in single digits. I think that's fine, for now, just to get started with. One reason for optimism is that all sides of the party are weak at the moment. So there's still a fight to be had, but now it might be more of a fair fight than it was 2 or 3 years ago.

In terms of policy areas, I did a review of the Trade and Corporation Agreement last year. It took me about a year. I spoke to 40 or 50 trade and business organizations, and wrote a 150 page report about how to improve it. So they are very much still pushing that report and the recommendations in that. And there's also a number of areas where the Labour government can act on its own, which would make a big difference. The Tories launched something called the Single Trade Window, which would allow exporters to put all their export information in one place once and in one go, so as to really streamline the process. I think it was going to cost about £300 million, £180 million has been spent, but it would save £10 billion over a 10-year period. The Labour Government have now postponed it indefinitely. If you want to boost trade with the EU, that's an obvious first step.

On top of that the EU's got its own system, called the single window customs environment, or something like that. And if we can link these two systems, it would streamline all trade between the UK and EU. Which seems like quite a good thing. Why has the Labour Government paused the roll-out of our system? We're not sure. So we're going to try and push on small non-controversial areas like this as the immediate focus.

Jonathan Harris: Does the APPG have terms of reference, and will they be published on the website? Your Secretariat presumably has a role in drafting papers and so on? I'm just trying to get a firmer understanding of how that interacts with the policy agenda and the priorities moving forward.

Simon Saunders: Yes, we do have a terms of reference that we still need to publish on the website, which will go up with the membership list hopefully shortly. [The

current website contains a brief mission statement.] APPGs are officially for parliamentarians and parliamentarian-led. But you're absolutely right in terms of what we have been doing to take the initiative and propose different themes, different topics, different papers. We can, as the Secretariat drive that forwards.

Strictly speaking, it's Parliamentarian-led. But in practice, we do have a role in shaping that agenda and doing things. And so far, that seems to be going absolutely fine. And the group's been comfortable with us leading on that.

Where I think we might run into difficulties further on is if we want to put out anything in more public-facing statements, given the cross-party nature of the group and given the different sensitivities of the political parties, finding common ground there is going to mean centring on taking evidence, producing fact-based reports, etc.

Agreed position statements on political issues are a bridge that we haven't crossed as yet.

Chair: Thanks, Simon. We're coming close to the end. You've shown great stamina in fielding a range of questions. We might want to think together a bit more about how we can organize to exploit this huge potential which your new but very dynamic group could be adding as a new part of the landscape.

Simon Saunders: Thank you and yes, we do have real opportunity here. We're very happy to connect grassroots, groups, or around specific issues. Together with the parliamentarians we can absolutely offer support with that, whether that's briefings or organizing events in Parliament, we can hopefully find an MP to host. And our team, myself and Joe will be very happy to help wherever we can. For people in London, one of our members is Marsha de Cordova [Labour, Battersea] and she's also Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly.

Chair: and in terms of links to links to the the Member States, you mentioned that one of the officers is also the chair of the Poland APPG.

Simon Saunders: Yes, our Co-Chair Rosena Allin-Khan is chair or vice-chair of the Poland APPG. Lord Kirkhope is Vice chair of the Germany APPG. Wera Hobhouse, I

think is involved with Germany as well, so we've got quite good cross-coverage. There are parliamentarians with connections with other Member States as well.

Chair: In this extended family of organizations that gather here, we've got people like Paul Browne in Cambridge for Europe who have done work on Georgia and and Ukraine, and Magdalena Williams, who's helped to set up very high level inputs for us from Poland and Hungary, for example, and those conversations look to be potentially very influential. Given Poland's role at the moment as President of the Council of the EU, maybe with Parliamentarians who've got an interest in Poland or Hungary, we might be able to try to set up some discussions.

Simon Saunders: The Polish Ambassador has been engaging with the APPG, and very interested in how it develops. He came to the launch as well. So there's a number of them. It's not uniform across all the Member States yet, some links are stronger than others, but there's good diplomatic engagement, I would say, and they seem quite supportive.

Chair: So it might be possible to think about some kind of special interest group or coordinating channel for people who've got a connection with Spain or with Greece, for example.

A vote of thanks to our guest. Thanks very much, Simon. It's been very encouraging, exciting. to see and hear from you, and we hope to see you again very soon, with your colleague, Joe Meighan, and maybe, if we can avoid a recess or a national emergency or a budget, maybe some of your parliamentarians.

Simon Saunders: Thank you very much. Thank you.