European Union

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to watch Sarah speak

I am proud to represent a part of Torbay. How will I turn to residents in Brixham in my constituency, who suffered an 11% cut in formula grant last year and are suffering a 6.7% cut this year, and justify our taking the savings that they are making and handing them over to Europe?

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood, Conservative)

Many hon. Members will be asking themselves the same question.

We heard from the Financial Secretary what these EU officials are paid. The Prime Minister went to Brussels a week or two ago and said that one in six EU officials earned more than €100,000. He might have understated his case, because we need to compare like with like. Not only do they earn more than €100,000 but they pay a special, incredibly low tax rate that applies only to people who work for the EU. They get an enormous expatriate allowance that shoves on another €15,000 to €20,000. They get a huge housing allowance. And, while a group of people in this country are about to lose child benefit of about £85 a month, EU officials get paid, tax free, another €300 per month per child. They contribute virtually nothing to their pension contributions. Under the arrangement we have in this country, any time a public official earns more than the Prime Minister’s £142,500 that has to be signed off by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. If we had to sign off every time an EU official was, in effect, getting the same take-home pay there as the Prime Minister's salary here, that would apply to more than 5,000 European Union officials, or more than one in six. The Chief Secretary would be doing nothing else except signing off those requests.

Today we have an opportunity to debate and vote on the multiannual financial framework—the long-term budget. This comes round once every seven years. It requires unanimity among member states and primary legislation in this House to implement it.

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Does my hon. Friend accept that, although in the past the Conservative party was divided on Europe, it is now united? We are all opposed to the budget increase and want to strengthen the hand of the Prime Minister, whom I support absolutely?

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