

## Meet the candidates: Conservatives

Timothy Kirkhope served as an MP for Leeds North East from 1987-1997. He has been an MEP for Yorkshire & the Humber since 1999, and served as Leader of the Conservative Party in the European Parliament from 2004-2007 and 2008-2010

By [Christy Cooney](#), Deputy Politics Editor (2013/14)

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Photo Credit: Leila Paul

### **Tell us about what you've achieved in Brussels over the course of your last term**

I've been concentrating on my job as a co-ordinator for the British Conservatives on the Justice and Home Affairs committee in which I think we have achieved quite a lot. We have changed the whole focus of that committee's work onto that of cooperation across Europe rather than harmonisation, which of course is something that the Conservatives are not particularly keen on. Criminals, terrorists, people who are involved in cyber crime, which is a very major issue now for us all to tackle, all of those people have been put under much greater threat.

### **Tell us about the work you've been doing in Yorkshire & the Humber.**

I'm quite proud of some of the work that I've been able to do. In particular, supporting regional initiatives, such as the continuing European grants under the social funds for projects, particularly in the poorer parts of our region. I'm particularly proud of the work we've done in trying to help rural areas and our farming communities, and indeed fishing communities, to benefit from monies which have been available through the European Union.

I also spend a reasonable amount of time when I'm in the UK visiting schools, as well as some colleges

and universities, particularly dealing with fifth and sixth form students, talking to them about public service, and opportunities that exist if they want to get into the political process, and I've found that that has been enormously useful, and also talking about Europe, and talking quite openly about the need for reform.

We are very lucky with our region, actually. Although we've had a bad hit through austerity, one of the worst hits in terms of employment and so on, we now could claim to be I think, outside of the Southeast, the most vibrant region in the country, and the one that I think is going to show the greatest successes with the economy recovering.

**We hear a lot about waste and bureaucracy in Brussels. What can be done to address it?**

I would argue always for transparency as far as possible. I would argue for proper accounting and auditing. The systems in Brussels are being revised as we speak and have been revised to make sure that there is less abuse of European money. But I would just point out that the money that is often wasted or cannot be accounted for is nearly always money that is paid by the European Union to the nation states. It is at the level of the dispensing of that money in the nation states, including I have to say in the UK, where doubts and concerns arise as to the proper use of those funds. So it is important that we realise that transparency has to come right through the system from the start down to the grass roots.

**What, as a Conservative, do you think are the most important reforms to ensure the EU's success?**

We need to look at the way in which Europe was formed and at the priorities and reasons for the European Union, which were predominantly to maximise our external market in goods and services, and to make this market truly a powerful block in the world. We're up against other trading blocks now, and they don't waste a lot of time on peripheral issues. They are concentrating on the economics, on competitiveness, on minimising regulation. Even the Chinese and the Indians, who are big competitors, are now minimising regulation. Bearing in mind the background of those states it's quite incredible what they're doing.

What we do not need is a whole lot of peripheral activity under the name of the EU, which just causes consternation, pettiness, directives and regulations that frankly are interfering in people's lives, not enhancing their chances economically.

**What can voters get by sending a Conservative candidate to Brussels that they wouldn't get by sending a UKIP candidate?**

UKIP are a sort of nihilist operation in a way. They simply come out with popular statements. They don't turn up in the parliament here, other than to claim their expenses, and occasionally to stage some kind of drama before they go home. They have done absolutely nothing, considering there were 13 of them elected in 2009, it's now down to six due to sackings, defections and general fallings out in that party. As for representing the region or representing the people of Britain in a wider context, they have done absolutely nothing identifiable that has been positively useful to the British people.

**Are you worried that being in coalition with a strongly pro-EU party could lose the Conservatives votes to UKIP in the European elections?**

Not particularly. But I think it must be made clear that the Liberals are not the only party that says they would like to remain in Europe. We would like to remain in Europe. The difference between us and the Liberals is that the Liberals don't seem to be setting down any terms whatsoever for staying in the European Union. They're simply providing a blank cheque to the EU and its institutions to do whatever it likes, whereas the Conservatives have been rather clearer, in that we would like to remain in the EU, but in order to do so we need reforms and to make Europe much more acceptable to the British people. That seems to me to be a slightly more courageous thing.

**Do you think enough is being done both in Westminster and Brussels to address the potential impacts of climate change?**

Well the fact of the matter is that it is happening, and it is going to accelerate in my opinion, and we

therefore have to take that into account in a number of ways. And I have been talking about resources and flood protection, but the flood protection isn't the answer of course longer term. What we have to do is look at the planning laws, we have to make sure that we plan in anticipation. We have to look at the erosion of our coasts, and at a whole lot of environmental issues, and I'm glad to say that from a European perspective there is a full awareness of this, and in the right circumstances there are resources available to help governments.

Some of the flood defences that were put in historically have unfortunately not sustained through some of the really bad incidents. What that shows you is that our plans are clearly not ambitious enough. I think people are going to have to understand and accept that a higher level of public expenditure is going to be necessary.

### **Where do you see the UK's relationship with the EU being in 15 years' time?**

First of all, I hope that we will still be members of a European community, whether it is still called the European Union or whether it is called the European Economic Community, which in my view was always a better name.

The arrival into Europe in the early 2000s of members that were part of the Soviet Union before, that have gotten their freedom back, gotten their independence back, started to rebuild their true history again, they do not want to give up that history and independence again. They feel very proud of what they are again, uncontrolled by the Soviets, and therefore they are quite useful buffers against the ambitions of one or two of the original members of the European community - Germany, France, Italy - and they join with us on a lot of occasions. They prefer to speak English now, they've dumped Russian. We have done extremely well in terms of our relationship with these countries since they became free again, and I just see them working with us, and having the right kind of Europe actually which respects member states, which works in a co-operative fashion, but where harmonisation and integration becomes yesterday's story.



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