



Mythbusters – media myths about the EU and the truth

We've all read them or heard them. Even Labour Party members quote them. They are the myths and legends that the media propagate about the European Union.

So here are some of the most regular myths, and the much-less interesting truth about why they aren't true. So next time someone quotes one of the myths at you, you can tell them the truth.

The Straight Banana

The Myth – the EU wants to ban bananas that aren't straight

The truth – no-one wants to ban bent bananas. The national governments of the various European countries, through the Council of Ministers, asked for bananas to be classified, so that shops knew what they were ordering. The retail industry asked for these classifications. A banana can still be as straight or curved as ever.

Britain pays a fortune to support the EU

The Myth – Britain pays more than any other country for the EU, and it costs each family £400 a year

The truth – A Daily Mail favourite, and one of the most common ideas quoted on the doorstep. Shame it isn't true. In 2006 Britain paid 68 Euro per head, whereas the Dutch paid 241 Euro, Sweden 124 and Germany 100 Euro per head. And Britain received back nearly 50 Euro per head in structural funds.

Armed Euro police on the streets of Britain

The Myth – the Lisbon Treaty means Britain must have armed EU police officers on patrol on our streets

The truth – It's nonsense. 5 EU member countries proposed a European Gendarmerie Force to work together in their countries. The EU has nothing to do with the idea, and it doesn't affect Britain at all.

The EU wants to get rid of the mile

The Myth – the EU wants to make all our road signs show distances in kilometres

The truth – Britain has a permanent derogation, so our road signs will be in miles.

The EU wants to change Bombay Mix to Mumbai Mix

The Myth – the EU insists that the name be changed

The truth – this illustrates where myths sometimes come from. This story was made up by a news agency in Britain to drum up business with national newspapers. The Sun and the Mirror published the story without checking.

The EU wants to make Kent part of France

The Myth – the EU wants to force parts of Britain to become parts of the other EU countries, starting with Kent becoming part of France

The truth – another illustration of how these silly stories start. An EU programme called INTERREG was set up to help neighbouring regions in different countries work together to overcome common problems. One map showed the Transmanche region, of Kent, north-east France and Belgium. These areas share the English Channel and transport systems, so it makes sense for them to work together. A map of the scheme showed this group as a single area – and the myth was born that France was going to take over Kent!

The EU wants to ban 999

The Myth – the EU wants to have a single Euro emergency phone number, so 999 will be banned

The truth – 999 is safe. But if you're in France and need to call for an ambulance, what number do you call? What's the number in Greece, or Austria? The EU has agreed that AS WELL AS the local emergency number of 999 or whatever, there is a second number 118 that does the same job, but is the same throughout Europe. Sounds like a sensible idea to us.

All our laws come from Brussels

The Myth – our Parliament has to do what the EU says, and all our laws come from there now

The truth – The House of Commons Library researched this issue and Richard Corbett MEP quoted their answer in 2008 – only 9% of our laws come from the EU.

These are just some of the myths – for more information and many more myths, the European Commission website is useful:

http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/euomyths/index_en.htm

But these stories must be true – they're in the papers!

How Euro myths happen

By Richard Corbett MEP

The poor quality of UK press coverage of the EU is something I've often moaned about. Those who think I exaggerate should read the 2007 article by David Rennie, who was until then the Daily Telegraph correspondent in Brussels, so cannot be accused of coming from a pro-Europe stable.

In his article in E! Sharp magazine he says:

"British press reporting on the European Union is getting sharply worse. This matters more than you might think. When barmy Brussels stories first became a staple, they usually contained at least a speck of truth, which was then spun into an overblown confection like so much candy floss. Lately, however, once-serious newspapers have printed several stories that have not been checked at all or - strikingly - have been flatly denied by EU or government press officers, but published anyway."

He goes on to ask:

"Why are things getting worse? Here are a few hunches. British newspapers are turning their backs on Europe. While the Brussels press corps is growing overall, the number of full-time staff correspondents from the UK is shrinking steadily. The worst pieces are almost always written from London, unsullied by contact with arguments from Brussels."

My colleagues from other countries often tell me of their incredulity at how outright untruths find their way into headlines in some British newspapers, even when the papers themselves know the story to be untrue. And it is hard not to conclude that this drip drip drip of falsehoods denigrating the EU does not have an effect on public attitudes to Europe.

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About the Labour Movement for Europe

LME is a group of activists from all parts of the country and all parts of the Labour movement. We put the case for Europe, and we would like you to join us. Help us to get out the message to Labour party members and supporters. Your support will help us in our vital work – work like producing the European Election toolkit that this leaflet is part of.

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