

'Big business' and Brussels



By **Duncan Robinson**
September 22, 2016

It is the last thing the European Commission needs. Just as the furore over [Jose Manuel Barroso's new job](#) at Goldman Sachs starts to subside, another scandal emerges involving the business practices of a former commissioner.

This time it is Neelie Kroes in the spotlight after a leak of 1.3m files from the Bahamas corporate registry revealed that the Dutch politician [failed to declare a directorship](#) while she was the EU's competition chief.



There is no allegation Ms Kroes has done anything illegal, but commission rules dictate that commissioners "may not engage in any other professional activity, whether gainful or not". Ms Kroes's lawyer admitted that the former commissioner should have declared the directorship, adding: "She will take full responsibility for it."

The revelations will hinder attempts in Brussels to show that the EU is not too close to "big business" - a perception that lurks behind [widespread protests](#) against free trade deals with the US and Canada, right through to the result of the recent Brexit vote in the UK.

In response, the commission has attempted to demonstrate that it is on the side of "consumers" (or "voters", as politicians used to call them) - noisily pursuing allegations of tax avoidance by the likes of Apple, stirring up a firmer response to Volkswagen, and squeezing telecoms groups over roaming fees.

It has even treated its former president Barroso with barely concealed contempt since his new job at Goldman, stripping him of the “red carpet” treatment should he return to Brussels and opening an ad hoc ethics probe into the new role. Ms Kroes - who also got flak for [taking a role at Uber](#), after praising them in office - should not expect a much warmer welcome than Mr Barroso upon her next visit.

Elsewhere in Europe

Change or die It is one of the bleakest assessments yet of the euro’s survival prospects, and it comes from some of its most committed supporters. An international group of senior policymakers including former WTO chief Pascal Lamy and former ECB board member Jörg Asmussen yesterday published a plan to “repair and prepare” the single currency. Their message? Change, or die:

“Europe will again be hit by a new economic crisis. We do not know whether this will be in six weeks, six months or six years. But in its current set-up, the euro is unlikely to survive.”

Full piece [here](#).

No go zones Hungary sparked a diplomatic row with most of western Europe after [an official leaflet](#) declared London, Brussels, Marseille, Berlin, Stockholm and Copenhagen “no go” areas due to high immigration in those areas.



Roaming fudge Brussels attempted to clear up the PR mess it made of roaming by scrapping its controversial [90 day limit on days abroad](#). The initial limit triggered uproar, despite the fact hardly any Europeans would be affected. No matter: a fudge was provided, whereby there would be no limits but telecoms groups could intervene if they think customers are taking them for a ride. Expect this to end up in court sooner rather than later.

Populist games “Bread and circuses” would be an apt policy for a populist politician in Rome, right? Wrong. The city’s new(ish) mayor [Virginia Raggi](#), who belongs to the anti-

establishment Five Star Movement, dropped Rome's bid for the Olympics.

"It would be irresponsible to say yes to this candidacy," Ms Raggi said. "We do not want to mortgage the future of Rome and Italy. We do not want to take on more debt, to ask more money from Italians."

Sarko in Calais Nicolas Sarkozy went to Calais, which is home to a large migrant camp, with predictable results. [Le Monde](#): "For Nicolas Sarkozy, migrants are 'damage' and France is 'submerged'"

Putin peril Estonia's president accused fellow European leaders of "naivety" over Russia and criticised the push for more EU defences (if they come at the expense of Nato) in [this interview](#).

Putin pic Elsewhere, the leader of Germany's SPD party grins as he [meets Vladimir Putin](#) in Bild.

Brexit warnings

OECD warning Britain's economy will be [hit later but harder](#) by Brexit, according to the OECD. The results were seized on by both opponents and supporters of Brexit.

Wall Street warning US banks warned Theresa May that [it needs a "long runway"](#), and a transition period lasting several years, to prepare for [Brexit](#). (Whether said runway is necessary simply to ease their relocation to another European financial centre, they did not mention.)

Oxford warning It may have recently been crowned the best university in the world but Oxford is worried about losing staff, funding and its recent promotion to number one [because of Brexit](#). European Research Council funding is vital to the university, according to its vice chancellor.

"We worry that some of our academics who are funded by the ERC will feel that their research is in jeopardy and might be prone to move to a different university in the EU where they will feel more confident of receiving continuing funding,"

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