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Publication | 27.11.2009

e-fa: Strasbourg Round-Up November 2009

News bulletin from the European Free Alliance Group in the European Parliament

The European Free Alliance (EFA) draws together political parties fighting for democracy and self-determination for the stateless nations and regions of Europe. European Free Alliance MEPs sit in a joint European parliamentary group with the Greens, making up the fourth largest group in parliament.

EFA MEPs are

Jill Evans MEP - Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales (EFA Group President)
Ian Hudghton MEP - Scottish National Party (Vice-President)
Frieda Brepoels MEP - Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (Vice-President)
François Alfonsi - Partitu di a Nazione Corsa
Oriol Junqueras MEP - Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
Alyn Smith MEP - Scottish National Party
Tatjana Zdanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia

This week in Strasbourg: 23 - 26 November

EFA MEPs have been in Strasbourg this week for a plenary session of the European Parliament. Subjects on the agenda included the future accession to the EU of Croatia and Turkey, preparations for the Copenhagen climate conference, better compensation for airline passengers and preparations for the next EU Summit in December.

EFA MEPs show solidarity with the Palestinian People

EFA MEPs took part in a symbolic action at the Parliament in Strasbourg to show their support for the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People which takes place on 29 November.

The MEPs joined others in the plenary chamber in holding up posters displaying a map of Israel and Palestine based on the 1967 borders and with the slogan 'STOP OCCUPATION: Peace and two states now!

Local voices must be heard in Copenhagen

On Wednesday MEPs were voting on the EU's priorities for the Copenhagen climate change summit which takes place in December. The EU's negotiating position will be crucial in achieving a successful outcome to the talks.

EFA MEPs joined forces to emphasise the crucial role that historic nations and regions have to play in tackling climate change. They tabled a statement in the European Parliament stressing the important role of small nations and regions in implementing climate policy. The group emphasised that effectively delivering the policies needed to tackle climate change will be largely dependent on work done at a local level.

Jill Evans explained: *"Effectively tackling climate change will not be achieved without the crucial role that historic nations and regions are already playing. Around 80% of the actual mitigation and adaptation policies needed to tackle climate change will be delivered at local and regional level. What we do at local level to tackle climate change will be critical to the success or failure of any agreement. That's why our voice must be heard at Copenhagen."*

Language Rights and Lisbon

Civil Liberties Committee member Tatjana Zdanoka called for the European Commission to use changes under the Lisbon Treaty in order to protect the rights of linguistic minorities. She suggested that the Commission should 'name and shame' EU member states who fail in their obligations to linguistic minorities.

Ms Zdanoka was speaking during a debate in parliament this week on a European Commission statement on the use of minority languages in the EU. The MEP also called for more to be done to promote multilingualism in the EU institutions. She expressed regret that she is as yet not allowed to use her native Russian to address the European Parliament, even though it is the first language of 40% of the population of Latvia.

Zdanoka explained: *"The message must be, in my opinion, very simple: one who acts against the rights of persons belonging to minorities (including linguistic rights), acts against the core values of the European Union."*

Brazil beef imports

SNP MEP Alyn Smith demanded that meat imports from outside the EU should meet all EU standards during a debate on the controversial issue in Strasbourg. The Agriculture Committee wanted an explanation from animal health Commissioner Vasilliou about how the continued importation of Brazilian beef into the EU could be justified despite the fact that many farms failed veterinary inspections.

After the debate, Smith said: *"I am not going to let this issue rest. It is not just about Brazilian beef, it is about products with chemical residues as we tighten our chemicals regime; it is about American chlorinated chicken; it is about broiler chickens raised in pens smaller than those allowed in the EU; and indeed New Zealand untraceable lamb as we look to implement EID ourselves. Europe's farmers work to strict food quality controls and it is only equitable that importers must operate to the self same same rules, our consumers expect nothing less."*

Compensation for airline passengers

Transport Committee member Frieda Brepoels was a key supporter of a resolution in parliament this week which calls for measures to be brought forward to introduce guarantees of compensation and assistance for passengers should airlines go bankrupt.

MEPs backed the resolution which was welcomed by Brepoels who said that whilst EU legislation exists on airline passenger rights and safety, there are gaps which become evident when airlines fail. Brepoels added: *"Everyone agrees that passengers should get compensation if an airline fails. Now we need to work*

out a fair regulation together with the different sectors concerned."

EU funding for textile job losses

Frieda Brepoels supported the decision to allocate €9.2 million from the EU's Globalisation Adjustment Fund which will go to help deal with job losses in the textile industry in Flanders. In Limburg, seven textile firms have closed over the past year and a half with the loss of 631 jobs. This region will get €2.58million of the funding which can be used to help people look for new work, receive training etc. This was *"European funding being very usefully spent"* according to Brepoels.

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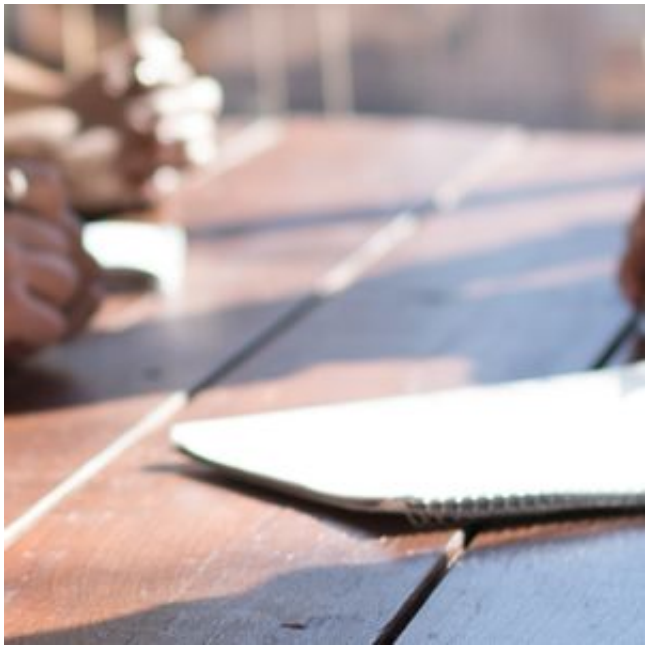

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