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e-fa: News Round-Up

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

May 2012 Round-Up

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 European parliamentary group with the Greens, making up the fourth largest group in the European parliament.

EFA MEPs are:

Jill Evans MEP - Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales (EFA Group President)
Ian Hudghton MEP - Scottish National Party (EFA Group Vice-President)
Frieda Brepoels MEP - Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (EFA Group Vice-President)
François Alfonsi MEP - U Partitu di a Nazione Corsa - Europe Ecologie
Ana Miranda MEP - Bloque Nacionalista Galego
Alyn Smith MEP - Scottish National Party
Tatjana Ždanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia



Key issues this month include:

- EP Open Day
- Austerity policies criticised
- CFP proposals questioned
- More action on kidney disease
- Help for Galician shipbuilding
- EU Commission in Scotland farming visit
- Switzerland criticised for immigration quotas
- Former MEPs back Basque peace process
- EFA MEP in Egypt visit
- Dialogue for peace in northern Mali

EP Open Day

More than ten thousand people visited the European Parliament on Saturday 12 May during the annual Open Day. Parliament's doors were opened to the public giving people far greater access and accessibility than on regular visitor tours.

The various parliamentary groups were represented, including EFA, with our colourful flag design roll-up banners drawing a great deal of interest. Visitors to the EFA stand could watch a short film about the group, pick up a brochure and sign-up for the EFA newsletter.

Austerity policies criticised

Ahead of May's informal Brussels summit to discuss the economy, jobs and growth, Plaid MEP **Jill Evans** called on EU leaders to reject failed austerity measures, and refocus on investment to promote growth and jobs. Jill used a special debate in the European Parliament to criticise the failure of austerity and point out its social consequences for people across Europe.

Speaking in the European Parliament, Jill said: *"We are seeing the unacceptable social costs of the austerity measures. We have to turn around our ailing economy in order to achieve a sustainable economy but we can't solve the problem by using the same policies that brought us here in the first place. In my own constituency in Wales, youth unemployment is rising dramatically and women are losing jobs at an alarming rate. Yet there is huge potential to build a thriving economy. We need an economy in which we can foster enterprise, combat inequality, create green jobs and support community and co-operative organisations.*

"We need procurement models that are accessible to small businesses to help the local economy and create employment. We need to invest in improving housing, health and the environment that will create millions of jobs as well as improving society. We have to look to the future and start re-focussing investment including the huge possibilities of the structural funds and the EIB. We have to look at jobs that can put people back to work and that are sustainable in the long term."

CFP proposals questioned

The SNP's **Ian Hudghton** reacted angrily to a proposal before the European Parliament which would sea up to 20 per cent of Scotland's waters closed to all fishing activities. The proposal came from German MEP Ulrike Rodust who is steering the Commission's proposal for a reformed Common Fisheries Policy through the parliament.

Ms Rodust has tabled an amendment which would require all EU Member States to designate between 10 and 20 per cent of their waters as "stock recovery areas", where all fishing activities will be prohibited.

Ian commented: *"These proposals are utterly nonsensical and have no practical or scientific basis. The requirement for all European countries to close a fixed percentage of their waters takes no account whatsoever of the state of their fisheries. The proposals will have a devastating effect on Scotland's fishing communities quite simply because we have one of the largest coastal areas in Europe.*

"Scotland's North Sea and Atlantic waters are the envy of many other countries and it is ludicrous to suggest that a fifth of the area must be closed."

More action on kidney disease

At a special lunchtime debate in the European Parliament, Flemish MEP **Frieda Brepoels** called for more to be done to improve patient choice in accessing health services for those suffering kidney disease.

Frieda chairs the European Parliament's MEP Group for Kidney Health. The event discussed differing levels of treatment in different European countries for those suffering kidney disease. A wide ranging survey conducted by CEAPIR (the European kidney patients' federation) reported that one of patients' main concerns was having the right to exercise choice over the kind of treatment available. Yet the ability to actually exercise this choice varied widely from country to country.

Speaking at the event, Frieda said: *"Informing kidney patients and involving them in the decision making process around their treatment is a fundamental right and should be a necessary cornerstone of any European and local health initiative. The results of the survey however show that we still have a long way to go to put this into practice across the EU. Policymakers, healthcare professionals and patients themselves need to work together to make this happen. The right treatment at the right time for all patients is not only crucial for patients' quality of life, but it would be also far more cost-effective."*

Help for Galician shipbuilding

Galician MEP **Ana Miranda** held a meeting in Strasbourg with Europe's Competition Commissioner Joaquín Almunia to discuss the future of Galicia's shipbuilding industry. Ana emphasised the urgency of the situation facing this economically and socially important sector in Galicia which generates 15,000 jobs.

She called for a new system of tax incentives to help with new shipbuilding contracts. Ana said during that meeting that Galician shipyards deserve to be able to compete on equal terms with other shipyards elsewhere in the EU.

EU Commission in Scotland farming visit

In the context of ongoing discussion about reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, SNP MEP **Alyn Smith** welcomed confirmation that European Commission officials will be visiting Scotland. They will discuss the ongoing issue of new entrants and Single Farm Payment eligibility, and speak to Scottish new entrants firsthand about the difficulties they face. The group will be in Scotland at the end of June, at Alyn's invitation in conjunction with the New Entrants Group.

Alyn, a member of the Parliament's Agriculture committee said: *"Encouraging younger people, with their skills, enthusiasm and innovative mentality, into farming is vital for the future of our food production and the vitality of the rural economy. Currently, however, new entrants have to compete for entitlement on a playing field which is far from level.*

"The market in entitlements is not working to support active farming as it should. It is unfair that payments should be based on a historical reference from a decade ago, long before most young farmers started. It is also unfair that, in lieu of an adequate active farmer definition, these payments can then be traded to land investors, keeping them out of the hands of new entrants and further widening that financial gulf."

Switzerland criticised for immigration quotas

The European Parliament heard harsh criticism in May of Switzerland's decision to introduce restrictions on immigration from central and eastern European countries. The issue centres on Switzerland's use of quotas on the number of residence permits it grants to nationals of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Lithuania.

The EU's Foreign Policy chief Baroness Ashton has already said that introducing such quotas goes against Switzerland's agreement with the EU on the free movement of people. MEPs backed a resolution criticising the quotas, and the Swiss decision was sharply criticised.

Latvian MEP and member of the Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee, **Tatjana Ždanoka** called for the concept of European citizenship to be considered as a solution to such problems.

Tatjana said: *"Why are EU Member States facing unequal treatment from third countries? Our European neighbour, Switzerland, has decided to re-establish quantitative limitations on the long term residence permits granted to nationals of eight of EU Member States that joined the EU in 2004 including my own country, Latvia. Our group deplores this decision of the Swiss authorities and calls for solidarity with the Member States concerned."*

Former MEPs back Basque peace process

More than sixty former MEPs backed the Aiete Declaration which seeks a peaceful resolution to the armed conflict in the Basque Country. The declaration and a list of first signatories amongst former MEPs was published following a press conference in Brussels at the beginning of May.

Taking part were current N-VA MEP **Frieda Brepoels** who has been active in supporting the Basque Peace process in the European Parliament, as well as former MEPs. Corsican MEP **François Alfonsi** was also present to give his support as a member of the European Parliament's Basque Friendship group.

In particular they highlighted the importance of international support for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and the need for the EU institutions to play a supportive role. The Basque representatives also called upon more MEPs to sign up in support and noted that new French President François Hollande is also a former MEP, and appealed for his support.

Speaking at the press conference, Frieda Brepoels said: *"Two years ago in this very room the Brussels Declaration was put forward by South African human rights lawyer Brian Currin. This was the first public step taken by the international community in supporting the current phase of the Basque peace process. In turn this created the momentum which led eventually to last October's historic Aiete declaration. I'm very pleased that former MEPs have also shown their willingness to actively engage themselves in support of a peaceful future for the Basque people."*

EFA MEP in Egypt visit

N-VA MEP **Frieda Brepoels** took part in a European Parliament delegation visit to Egypt in the run-up to May's presidential elections in that country. The aim of the visit was to get a first hand impression of the situation in the country more than a year after the beginning of the Arab Spring. The group met the

candidates for the Presidential elections, political activists, women's rights campaigners, political bloggers and civil society representatives.

Commenting on the visit, Frieda said: *"Egypt has an important period ahead. Universal rights such as equality between men and women have not yet been achieved. We also need to see the army fully hand over power to civilian government as soon as possible. Developments on the ground are a matter of concern. Many people that I spoke to, particularly young people and women, were worried that fundamentalists would take advantage of the power vacuum following the revolution to impose their own agenda. The European Union has a role to play in making sure that it supports building a strong civil society, the establishment of a democratic and inclusive constitution and in safeguarding human rights."*

Dialogue for peace in northern Mali

Corsican MEP **François Alfonsi** welcomed an initial dialogue between Malian officials and representatives of the Touareg movement at the European Parliament. The Corsican MEP organised a seminar at the European Parliament in Strasbourg to shed light on the situation in northern Mali's Azawad region where representatives of the Touareg people have declared independence from Mali.

The Touareg delegation to the seminar was made up of Mr Hamma Ag Mahmoud, former Touareg minister in the Malian government, Mrs Zakiyatou Oualett Halatine, former Touraeg minister in the Malian government and former UN official, as well as two spokespeople of MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), Mr Mossa Ag Attaher and Mr Mossa Ag Assarid. Representatives of the Malian government, as well as MPs from the Malian national assembly also took part in the seminar and had an exchange of views with the Touareg.

Following the discussions, François commented: *"I am pleased that the European Parliament has been able to open a dialogue between the parties involved in this conflict and I hope that will contribute to a quick and peaceful solution. The very fact that an exchange of views has taken place is an encouraging sign. Now, the European Union must do all it can to ensure that dialogue continues.*

"Europe should respect Azawad's right to self-determination. For more than sixty years, the Touareg people have been victims of marginalisation and discrimination. It's quite legitimate that they should now be claiming their fundamental rights of freedom and recognition of their culture and territory."

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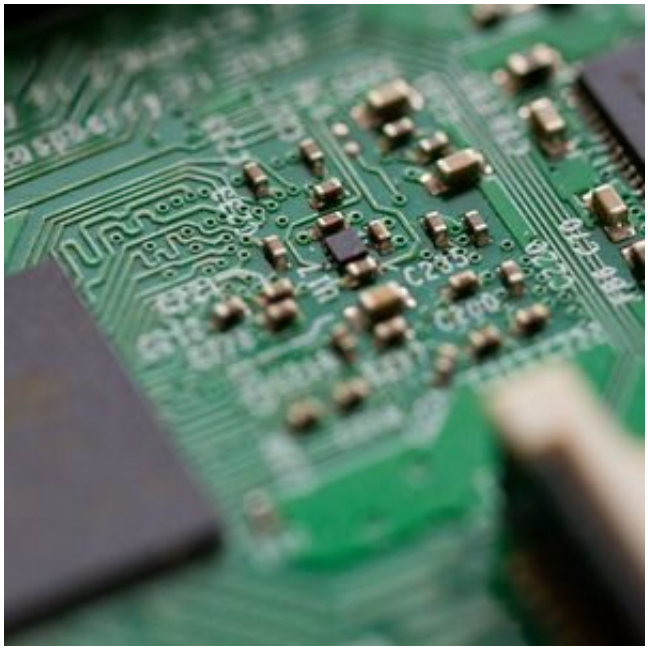


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