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e-fa: News Round-Up

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

January 2013 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



N-VA's Frieda Brepoels to leave Parliament

Flemish nationalist **Frieda Brepoels** will leave the European Parliament on 1 February to become Mayor of her home town of Bilzen. An MEP since 2004, Frieda has been active in Flemish politics for over thirty years. First as a member of the Volksunie and later of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, she has been an elected representative at local, provincial, Flemish, federal and European level.

Frieda is Vice President of the EFA Group in the EP and has been particularly active as a member of the Environment Committee, campaigning on public health issues such as combating kidney disease and diabetes.

She will be replaced by Mark Demesmaeker, currently a member of the Flemish Parliament.

Paying tribute to Frieda, EFA President **Jill Evans** said: *"I am delighted for Frieda's success - a great election victory - and am proud to be a friend of the new Mayor of Bilzen. And knowing Frieda I know too that she would never take on a position without giving it 100%. That meant, of course, that she would give up her seat in the European Parliament. That is a great loss for all of us in parliament, but most of all for the Greens/EFA group and most of all for EFA - the European Free Alliance.*

"It was MEPs from Frieda's party - Volksunie at that time - that saw the need for a grouping with the EP to work for self determination for stateless nations, for recognition of all the languages and cultures in the EU and for the rights of minorities.

"I know that Frieda will be a fantastic mayor. She is determined, hard working, passionate about her politics and compassionate too. Here in the parliament she has made such a contribution on the environment, on international issues and support for minorities and many many other things. On a personal level, I got to know Frieda for the first time in Gaza on a delegation visit. I realised that above all she will do everything in her power to change things - to end injustice and enable people to live freely and make their own decisions in whatever part of the world they live."

MEPs welcome Catalan Sovereignty Declaration

Several EFA MEPs welcomed a vote in the Catalan Parliament to approve a declaration of sovereignty.

The vote is significant in that it begins the process of negotiation by which a majority of Catalonia's elected representatives aim to achieve independence for their nation within the European Union. Political parties that favour Catalan independence and EU membership won a majority of seats in recent elections to the Catalan Parliament. The declaration that Catalonia is a sovereign entity was passed by 85 votes in favour, 41 against and two abstentions.

The declaration makes clear that the path towards self-determination will be achieved through negotiation with the Spanish state, European Union and international community. Catalonia's leading parties had already indicated that they aim to hold an independence referendum before the end of 2014.

Describing the vote as a 'significant step forward on the path to self-determination', EFA MEPs **Jill Evans, François Alfonsi, Ana Miranda** and **Frieda Brepoels** said in a joint statement: *"Europe needs to be ready for the prospect of Catalan independence. The European Commission cannot pretend that this isn't happening nor can they ignore the democratic will of the Catalan people.*

"The European Union is a great beacon of peace and democracy throughout the world. The principles that we espouse abroad must also apply within our borders. Europe must be ready for constructive dialogue based on the democratically expressed will of the Catalan people."

Cameron Speech: Scornful reaction in Wales and Scotland

Following the UK Prime Minister's speech which promised renegotiation and a referendum on UK membership of the EU, reaction in Wales and Scotland has been highly critical. The SNP argued that the only a 'yes' to Scottish independence in 2014 would secure Scotland's future as a successful member of the EU.

SNP MP Angus Robertson said: *"After months of scaremongering about Scotland's relationship with the EU, the anti-independence campaign has now been impaled by its own arguments. They have stressed the importance of being a part of the single market, but the speech from David Cameron is final proof that it is in fact the anti-independence campaign and a No vote which would put this under threat. Only a Yes vote in 2014 can secure Scotland's successful future as an independent country and a guaranteed member of the EU."*

Welsh nationalists Plaid Cymru argued that Wales should play a positive, prominent role in the EU, maximising the advantages of European Union membership. MEP Jill Evans said: *"We want to see a vibrant, prosperous Wales working in partnership with other European Union nations. The other parties are playing political games which could have disastrous consequences. Only Plaid Cymru is working for the Welsh national interest.*

"We in Wales need EU funding to strengthen our economy, develop our infrastructure and create much needed jobs in our poorest areas. Our economy is weak because of successive UK government policies. With its aim of cohesion and its policy of redistributing wealth, the EU is helping us overcome some of the problems.

"In addition to that, hundreds of individuals and organisations have been helped by the Social Fund. Losing that support would be a major step backwards. Central to Wales's future is a positive and productive partnership with a European Union that provides support to its poorest areas, protects workers and encourages innovation and ambition. It is crucial that isn't destroyed by London. But if the UK parties are determined to repatriate powers from the EU, we will demand that they are transferred to Wales."

MEPs set to investigate language diversity

The European Parliament is set to examine in detail the issue of language diversity and protecting endangered languages in Europe, for the first time in a number of years. There has been no major, in-depth international study into endangered languages since the 1990s.

Leading the work is the European Parliament's only Corsican-speaking MEP, **François Alfonsi**. He says it's high time for the European Parliament and Commission to take stock of Europe's diverse linguistic

tapestry, and propose measures to ensure language diversity can thrive.

But whilst promising that his report will praise those EU member states that are most successful in protecting endangered languages, the Corsican MEP said those European states which don't come up to scratch could be named and shamed. M. Alfonsi is preparing the report for the European Parliament's Culture Committee. A draft is expected to be put before the committee in April, which will be put to the vote in June.

Explaining the thinking behind the report, M. Alfonsi said: *"Language diversity needs to be seen as an economic as well as a cultural imperative. It's more relevant and important today than ever before. This issue has been largely ignored at EU level over the past decade and this has to change. We need to take stock of Europe's linguistic diversity and produce a clear picture of the state of health of Europe's languages.*

"This is not just an issue for regional or local languages. It's just as important for state languages which also face challenges, particularly in this digital age. Take Irish Gaelic as an example - being the state language of Ireland and an official EU language isn't enough by itself for the language to thrive. And if that can be said for Irish, then which will be next? Estonian perhaps, or Maltese?

"It's important that we wake up to these challenges now before it's too late to intervene effectively. We will be culturally impoverished, and I believe economically impoverished, if we see a decline in language diversity in Europe. We must set out a clear picture of the status quo, and identify the political, financial and administrative support that will be needed by Europe's languages in future."

Credit Rating Agencies to be regulated

Plaid MEP **Jill Evans** has welcomed the European Parliament's decision to approve legislation regulating Credit Rating Agencies. In future these bodies will only be able to issue sovereign debt ratings at specific times and they will be liable for damages in the event of ill founded ratings.

Unfavourable credit ratings have led to soaring public debt in many countries which has caused financial hardship for a great number of people.

Speaking after voting in favour of the legislation, Ms Evans said: *"Decisions made by credit rating agencies can see the cost of a country's public debt soar overnight. The knock-on effects of this include cuts in public spending which leads to real financial hardship for many families. It's absolutely right that these agencies should be held to account for their decisions. If you buy a house on the basis of bad advice, you can quite rightly hold to account those who gave you the bad advice. The same should be a true for Credit Rating Agencies.*

"In Wales we've seen our neighbours in Ireland suffering terribly at the hands of the ratings agencies. The tipping point in Ireland's debt crisis was the downgrade in its credit rating. The knock-on effects were devastating for a significant number of people. Now the UK's coveted AAA rating is under review and any increased cost in servicing the UK's national debt would no doubt have a harmful knock-on effect on us in Wales."

Condemnation of Kurdish killings

EFA MEPs condemned the killing of three Kurdish rights activists in Paris earlier this month. The three women were shot dead at a building in the city used by Kurdish rights campaigners.

EFA MEP **Ana Miranda** (Galicia) called for a full investigation to reveal the truth behind the killings. Ana has long been a strong supporter of a peaceful resolution of the Kurdistan issue through negotiation,

and of Kurdistan's right to self-determination.

Mostly found in south eastern Turkey, but also in surrounding countries, Kurds have their own distinct language and culture. In Turkey they have been engaged in a decades long conflict for autonomy which has often been marred by violence.

French authorities have reportedly arrested two individuals in connection with the killings.

EFA Film premiere: Living Under Occupation

EFA MEPs **Jill Evans, Francois Alfonsi** and **Ana Miranda** were joined by Palestinian MP Abdullah Abdullah for a film screening and debate on the occupation of Palestine and options for the future.

The film was produced by the three MEPs as part of their visit to the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem last October, organised in conjunction with the CEPR. The film focuses on life under occupation and the challenges facing Palestinians, including settlement building and frequent check points.

More information on the visit here
http://efa.greens-efa.eu/efa-visit-to-the-west-bank-and-east-jerusalem-8124.html

CAP Reform

The Parliament's Agriculture Committee has been voting on the latest stage in proposals to reform the Common Agricultural Policy.

The SNP's **Alyn Smith** - a full member of the Committee - was up-beat about the outlook for Scotland's farming sector. Alyn said: *"We've seen some good results for Scottish farmers, most notably on greening which has been made considerably more flexible in light of the amendments than what the Commission originally proposed. We've also seen the herbaceous issue put to rest, with a good definition of permanent pasture agreed upon. New entrants have definitely seen the CAP move in the right direction, with guarantees of support contained within Article 21 and within the passages on the National Reserve which is really excellent news. Importantly, too, the so-called Scottish Clause in Article 9 to tighten the definition of active farming was successful which I hope will work to lend the CAP a greater degree of legitimacy amongst the public."*

But Welsh MEP **Jill Evans** was less positive. She warned that a compromise on reform is not enough to protect Welsh farmers from the repercussions of a drastic cut in the agricultural budget. The Agriculture Committee does not have the mandate to agree on the overall budget, which looks set to be cut by 7% for the next seven year period.

Jill said: *"CAP funding is absolutely essential for Wales as it contributes over £350m a year to our economy. 80% of Welsh farmers are dependent on direct payments to maintain their businesses and provide us with food. There should not be a significant reduction in the CAP budget, as it is essential we support our farmers until they get a fair price for those products they produce."*

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Press release

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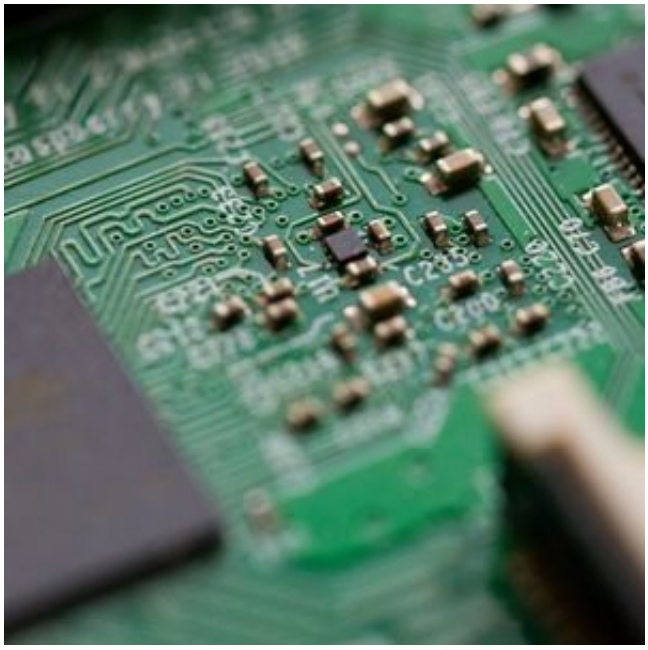


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Responsible MEPs



Jill Evans

Member



Ian Hudghton

Member



Heather Anderson

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