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# e-fa: News Round-Up

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

**November 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

Highlights this month include:

- **Election triumph for Catalan nationalists**
- **Fishy business**
- **Calls for end to Gaza violence**
- **Non-citizens seeks fully-fledged passports**
- **Jill opposes EU budget cut**
- **Date change possible for next Euro elections**
- **New EU rights for victims of crime**
- **EU support for Limburg**
- **Caution urged on fracking**



**Election triumph for Catalan nationalists**

EFA party Esuqerra Republicana de Catalunya performed outstandingly at recent Catalan elections. The left wing republican party led by former EFA MEP Oriol Junqueras more than doubled its representation in the Catalan parliament where it now has 21 seats and potentially holds the balance of power.

Some two thirds of seats in Catalonia's parliament were won by parties supporting a referendum on Catalan independence within the European Union.

EFA MEP Frieda Brepoels from Flanders welcomed the result. Frieda said: *"Following these early elections, more than sixty per cent of the Catalan parliament is now made up of supporters of independence. It seems that the Catalan premier Artur Mas will remain in post, but his party has suffered losses. I congratulate our EFA partners Esquerra Republicana who gained eleven seats. Together, the pro-independence parties now have a majority in favour of holding an independence referendum."*

**Fishy business**

The European Parliament held a joint debate in Strasbourg to try and get to grips with some of the major challenges facing Europe's fishing industry. Parliament is currently looking at a number of different pieces of legislation on fisheries policy, and at its centre is reforming the controversial Common Fisheries Policy.

The SNP President Ian Hudghton took part in the debate and called for greater decentralisation.

Ian said: *"The point here which is relevant to CFP reform is that decisions on the detail of technical measures are surely best made by the fishing nations themselves, through decentralised decision-making. I hope that will be taken on board in a new CFP. Mr Ferreira rightly points out that there are very diverse ranges of types of fishery and therefore that centralised control is not the best way to manage these resources for the benefit of consumers and communities. Again, I hope that decentralisation, rather than such things as mandatory closed areas, will be the way forward."*

**Calls for end to Gaza violence**

EFA MEPs backed demands for a ceasefire in Gaza, which was subjected to sustained Israeli bombardment earlier this month. The MEPs including Jill Evans, Frieda Brepoels and François Alfonsi supported a resolution in the European Parliament calling for an end to all aggression. They also called for an end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza so that humanitarian aid and essential supplies could get through to civilians.

They said that there was no justification for the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. The Israeli

blockade has been in place since 2007 preventing the movement of people and access to essential goods.

They condemned the use of violence and urged the EU to take an increasingly active role in building a lasting peace and bringing an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Looking ahead to Palestine's bid for permanent observer status at the UN, the EFA MEPs backed the move as a step towards achieving a peace agreement. Three MEPs from the EFA Group visited Palestine last month.

EFA President and Plaid Cymru MEP Jill Evans said: *"Our sympathy is with all the victims of the recent violence. It is vital that the UN, EU and the international community take serious steps to end the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the occupation of Palestine. The only long term prospect for peace is an end to the conflict and a two state solution."*

Flemish MEP Frieda Brepoels (N-VA) said: *"Respect for international human rights and humanitarian law by all parties remains an essential precondition for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Current developments are therefore extremely worrying and could potentially have enormous consequences in the whole Middle East adding to an already tense situation in the region."*

Corsican MEP François Alfonsi, said: *"This umpteenth renewal of violence between Hamas and Israel shows not only how deeply ingrained this conflict is, but also reveals, once again, the helplessness and incompetence of an international community that is complicit in the slow decay of the two-state solution. We know that extremists on both sides of the conflict will not achieve a two-state solution."*

**Latvia's non-citizens seek fully-fledged passports**

Tatjana Ždanoka invited campaigners on behalf of Latvia's non-citizens to present their case at a meeting of the European Parliament's Minorities Intergroup in Strasbourg in November in connection with the decision of Latvia's Central Election Commission to reject the application for a referendum aimed at solving the problem of mass statelessness in Latvia.

MEPs heard that around 17% of Latvia's permanent population (some 300,000 people) have the status of non-citizens. These are mostly Russian speakers who have not been granted citizenship in post-Soviet Latvia.

Campaigners pointed out that these people live in Latvia, they work and pay taxes there and most were born there, yet they continue to be denied citizenship usually on linguistic grounds.

The meeting also heard from the Council of Europe's Commission on Racism and Intolerance. In their report they called on Latvia to automatically grant citizenship to the children of Latvian non-citizens and to confer eligibility and voting rights to non-citizens in local elections.

**Jill opposes EU budget cut**

Research published by Plaid MEP Jill Evans showed that Wales receives more in EU funding than it contributes.

Every person in Wales is around forty pounds (£40) a year better off due to membership of the European Union. Jill used the figures to argue that EU funding for Wales will be put at risk if the overall EU budget is cut. This dominated a summit in Brussels in November.

According to Jill's report, on average each person in Wales contributes €195.82 per year to the EU, whilst EU funding to Wales is worth an estimated €243.98 per person annually.

Jill said: *"Wales receives huge sums of money from the European Union. In fact, we receive more per head from the EU than we contribute. This funding will be put at risk if the EU budget is cut.*

*"In these tough economic times, we need European funding more than ever. We need the support of EU funding in Wales to help create jobs and strengthen the economy. We certainly won't get that support from the London Treasury. That's why it's vital for the EU budget to be protected."*

**Date change possible for next Euro elections**

Discussions have begun about the possibility of bringing forward the date of the next European elections by one month to May 2014.

The final decision will be taken by ministers in the European Council early next year, but this month the European Parliament gave its advice on the matter.

European elections have usually been held at the start of June, but in 2014 this would clash with Whitsun holidays in many countries. This has led to concern about a negative impact on turnout.

MEPs broadly supported the proposals, seen as a way to boost turnout. Other suggestions included inviting European political parties/families to propose candidates for President of the European Commission.

Flemish nationalist Frieda Brepoels welcomed the proposals, and called for Europe to learn from Flanders in supporting gender balance in elections. Brepoels said: *"In Flanders, rules already exist to promote a good balance between men and women on electoral lists. I regret that the European Parliament did not back calls for similar requirements elsewhere in Europe, whilst approving calls for a threshold which could favour bigger groups."*

**New EU Rights for Victims of Crime**

SNP MEP Alyn Smith hosted a conference in the European Parliament highlighting the importance of Victims' rights. This followed a new EU directive which was published recently and based on best practise in Scots law – setting a minimum standard across the EU for the victims of crime.

Previously victims' rights differed from state to state, meaning that many who were victims of crime whilst living, travelling or holidaying abroad in Europe suffered as a result of the poor standards of the respective Member State. That has now changed with every EU citizen guaranteed a minimum set of rights if they are unfortunate enough to become victim to a crime.

Commenting, Alyn said: *"This was a successful conference to discuss the directive and how it will be put into practise. We also heard from people who have been victims of crime and where they thought improvements can be made, both domestically and across Europe. Anyone can become a victim, and this directive brings in the minimum standards of treatment anyone can expect, in any country. Without the EU as a framework to negotiate such a co-operation it would simply not have happened.*

*"This Directive also has Scottish fingerprints all over it, and draws quite explicitly from Scottish best practice. Victim Support Scotland was instrumental in making it happen, and I was proud to organise a lobbying meeting in Brussels in the Spring which heard heart breaking first hand testimony from numerous people about how the system has failed them."*

**Frieda wants EU support for Limburg**

The European Parliament discussed the restructuring in the automotive sector during its November plenary

session. N-VA MEP Frieda Brepoels took the opportunity to raise the closure of the Ford operation in Genk, in the Limburg province of Flanders, and called for a clear signal of support from Europe.

Brepoels argued that the impact of the closure on the whole region couldn't be underestimated. Frieda said: *"With a stroke of the pen, a multinational has decided that Ford Genk will close completely in 2014. Some 10,000 people will lose their jobs, a real disaster for our province. The promises that Ford gave only a few months ago about the factory's future now seem like hollow words. The affected workers and their families rightly expect the various levels of administration to pull their finger out and create future opportunities for Limburg."*

The Flemish Government and Limburg province are working on a new Limburgplan, and Frieda demanded to know what role Europe would play in this.

Frieda added: *"After the closure of the Opel factory in Antwerp, the European Parliament asked the Commission to ensure more policy coherence in dealing with the automotive sector to ensure that Europe's member states were not played off against each other. Yet, history seems to be repeating itself. Production is being unapologetically transferred from Genk to Valencia in Spain."*

**Caution urged on fracking**

'Fracking' or hydraulic fracturing is a process where companies drill underground, injecting water and potentially toxic chemicals to fracture rocks deep underground and release shale gas.

The European Parliament debated the issue in its November plenary session, with many different views being heard.

Plaid's Jill Evans was in favour of a moratorium on practice, whilst the SNP's Alyn Smith pointed out that the exploitation of energy resources lies outside the competence of the EU.

Jill Evans jointly tabled an amendment with more than a hundred MEPs to call for an EU moratorium. MEPs backed calls for caution, notably a ban in sensitive areas, and underlined the need for tougher regulation and proper application of existing EU rules, but fell short of supporting a complete moratorium.

Alyn Smith commented: *"The exploitation of energy resources is not a matter for the EU, and should remain with the national authorities. Fracking is a potentially interesting technology, but there remain real question marks over how safe it is, what impacts it has on the environment and, indeed, what sort of resource we actually have, as opposed to hypothetical projections. Fracking may well have a role to play in the EU's energy future but the jury is still very firmly out, and it should in any event be the national authorities who decide what is best for them."*

Jill Evans said: *"This is an issue of great importance to us in Wales. Areas all over the country are being targeted for test drilling. Plaid Cymru is calling for a total ban on fracking until all of the safety concerns have been addressed. We want to see the National Assembly given responsibility for energy projects. That is the only way to ensure that Welsh energy resources are exploited sensitively, sustainably and safely in the interests of the people of Wales."*

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Press release

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