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News | 19.12.2013

e-fa: News Round Up

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

November/December 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)
- **François Alfonsi MEP** - U Partitu di a Nazione Corsa - Europe Ecologie
- **Mark Demesmaeker MEP** - Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie
- **Inaki Irazabalbeitia MEP** - Aralar
- **Alyn Smith MEP** - Scottish National Party
- **Tatjana Ždanoka MEP** - For Human Rights in a United Latvia



Highlights include:

- EU-Morocco Fisheries Agreement
- CFP Reform
- Call for civilian peace corps
- One Parliament, One Seat
- Basque Peace Process
- Situation in Mali
- Waste Management in Valencia
- Ukraine
- CAP Reform

EFA MEPs criticise 'shameful' EU – Morocco Fisheries Agreement

EFA MEPs condemned as 'shameful' the agreement on fishing rights reached between the EU and Morocco, approved at a vote in Strasbourg this month.

The controversy stems from the inclusion in the agreement of Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. The agreement gives EU boats the right to fish in Western Saharawi territorial waters. This is illegal under international law, as Morocco has no right to hand away the natural resources of a country it occupies.

Western Sahara has been under Moroccan occupation since the mid-1970s when Spain decolonised the territory. Two years ago, MEPs rejected the same fisheries agreement following concerns about its legality, and the rights of the Saharawi people.

EFA MEP Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA, Flanders) said: *"The EU has enough to say about human rights and the rights of minorities all around the world, but when push comes to shove, it seems that strategic trade considerations are always paramount. By turning its back on the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination and control of its natural resources, the EU is increasingly a cause of conflict between Morocco and Western Sahara. This is a shameful episode in EU trade and fisheries policy."*

EFA MEP Inaki Irazabalbeitia (Aralar, Basque Country) said: *"This disgraceful agreement totally ignores the rights of the Saharawi people to determine their own future, and have control over their natural resources. The EU has put profit before people and abandoned its supposed principle of respect for human rights."*

EFA President Jill Evans MEP (Plaid Cymru, Wales) said: *"EFA has always supported the right of the*

people of Western Sahara to determine their own futures and have control over their own resources. This shameful vote ignores both of these principles. It is not for the EU or the Moroccan government to sign away control over the natural resources of an occupied territory. When the EU acts in this disgraceful way, it only undermines any credibility that Europe has to negotiate and promote respect for human rights on a world stage."

Common Fisheries Policy reform nears completion

SNP MEP and Party President Ian Hudghton welcomed the European Parliament's final approval of a reformed Common Fisheries Policy which will return greater control over fisheries to Europe's fishing nations. The reformed CFP allows for decisions to be taken on a regional basis, in contrast to the current one-size-fits all approach and the new law will come into effect on 1st January 2014.



The European Parliament also narrowly rejected a last-ditch attempt supported by the UK Labour and Lib Dem parties to impose a blanket ban on trawling below a certain depth. The Parliament instead voted for a science-led approach, including a ban on deep sea trawling where necessary to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems.

Ian commented: "For thirty years the CFP has failed fish stocks and failed the coastal communities dependent upon them. Centralised control by way of Brussels diktat has left many fish stocks seriously depleted and cost countless jobs around the coast. The reformed CFP brings powers back to Europe's fishing nations and will allow for more responsive decision-making. For decades the CFP has forced fishermen to discard fish back into the sea; the new policy will change that."

EFA President calls for EU civilian peace corps

EFA Group President Jill Evans (Wales) called for the establishment of a European Peace Corps during a European Parliament debate this month. MEPs were discussing the next summit of European leaders where the development of a European security and defence policy is on the agenda.

But Jill Evans warned that an effective security policy has to be integrated with anti-poverty and environmental policies. The MEP called for a refocus on building peace, and proposed the establishment of a Civilian Peace Corps, made up not of soldiers but of doctors, engineers, mediators – people with the skills to strengthen trust and break down barriers.

Jill said: "If we are to make Europe work we must show it has a clear future role, including internationally. The EU could be a real force for peace if we address all the threats facing people. An effective security policy has to be integrated with policies on poverty, the environment, energy, trade, food and water resources and so on. We must re-focus on building peace."

"What better way to do that than to enhance not military but civilian work - a Civilian Peace Corps to defuse tension, foster understanding and prevent conflict, working with the United Nations. Now is the time to invest not in arms but in people, especially young people, to create jobs, to recover and rebuild and enable all the

peoples, all the nations of Europe, like Wales, Flanders, Scotland, the Basque Country, to play their full part in doing that."

One Parliament, One Seat

Flemish MEP Mark Demesmaecker backed new plans to scrap the European Parliament's monthly commute to Strasbourg.

In November, MEPs voted to try and use new powers gained under the Lisbon treaty to influence their current obligation to move to Strasbourg once a month.

As things stand, MEPs are obliged by treaty to move from Brussels to Strasbourg for a full plenary session once a month at vast cost to the taxpayer. Although the wasteful practice has been widely condemned, an EU treaty change would be needed to alter the situation and this requires unanimity. France opposes any change.



MEPs called for the European Treaties to be changed so that the European Parliament itself is given the right to choose when and where it meets.

Mark said: *"It remains to be seen whether the decades long debate over the seat of the European Parliament can be resolved, but this vote certainly represents a new stage in the game. We've now put this on the table for discussion with the Member States. They'll have to deal with this and respond and that's exactly the point. At least this moves things forward."*

"We can no longer justify the costly and wasteful monthly commute to Strasbourg."

MEPs back Basque peace process

Several MEPs from different political groups signed an open letter calling for progress in the Basque peace process.

They called for progress in respect of political prisoners. This follows the verdict of the European Court of Human Rights on 21 October concerning Spain's extended detention of some prisoners. It was estimated that around 50 Basque political prisoners had been kept in detention when they should have been released years ago.

In their letter the MEPs say that respect for prisoners' rights should be the next logical step in resolving the conflict. They called for dialogue, and international and EU engagement in building a lasting peace.

The MEPs say in their letter: *"The respect of all the prisoners' rights should be the next logical step to keep moving for the resolution of the conflict in the Basque region; the end of the policy of dispersion and their transfer to prisons close to their families, as well as the immediate release of seriously ill prisoners are measures that could be adopted by the Spanish Authorities applying the ordinary legislation."*

Several EFA MEPs signed the letter.

Situation in Mali

EFA MEP François Alfonsi (Corsica) who has taken an active interest in the situation in Mali, responded to the address of the President of Mali Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to the European Parliament in December.

While the Ouagadougou agreement, signed in June 2013 by the Malian government, the MLNA and the HCUA, foresaw finding a political solution in Northern Mali within 60 days of the presidential election, nothing has really progressed since the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, four months ago.

Instead violence and lawlessness has continued and the EFA MEP urged the Malian President to resume dialogue. Touareg rebels in the north of the country have been campaigning to establish a separate independent homeland with its capital at Timbuktu.

Waste Management Conference

EFA MEP Inaki Irazabalbeitia hosted a conference in the European Parliament to draw attention to the serious problems of waste management in Valencia.

Dealing with waste is a very serious issue in Valencia, and there have been many reports of corruption hampering the situation.



There are problems with waste going to landfill, with waste treatment and with non-compliance of EU laws and directives on waste management and disposal.

A number of leading speakers were invited including Pura Peris from the Spanish Green Party, Ana Carla Mestre Martinez, an expert in waste management and local campaign groups.

The conference highlighted the significant problems faced by the Valencian Autonomous Community in dealing with waste management. Local campaign groups called for a sustainable waste management scheme to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and increase the amount recycled.

Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine was a subject for great debate in the European Parliament in December as hundreds of thousands took to the streets of Kiev to protest against their government's hostility to the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

Some saw this as the next step in Ukraine's pro-democracy revolution, whilst others said it showed just one side of the picture.

EFA MEP Mark Demesmaecker visited Kiev to see the situation for himself and took part in the protests on Maidan square. EFA MEP Tatjana Ždanoka pointed to opinion polls which showed that across the whole of Ukraine, public opinion on the issue of close ties with Europe was more finely balanced.



Speaking in the European Parliament, Tatjana Ždanoka said: *"First of all I would like to remind colleagues that today is 10 December. I am afraid nobody has mentioned the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed 65 years ago. It declares in its Article 1 that: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. I have several questions for speakers who spoke prior to me in this House. First of all, why do we not respect the dignity of our Eastern European partners by giving them lessons? Why do we not treat all Ukrainians as equal human beings? It is known that public opinion is divided 50-50 in favour of and against European accession. Why is only Maidan shown on Western European television rather than other squares in Ukraine?"*

"I was in Ukraine two months ago and I heard all the propaganda – mainly by Mr Yanukovych's party – in favour of accession. Nevertheless, according to all the polls, half the population has doubts about this accession. If we agree that all Ukrainians are equal, why are we afraid of a referendum?"

Mark Demesmaecker said: *"This movement is different to what went on in 2004. The 'orange revolution' was inspired by party politics after a controversial presidential election. But this feels more like a popular uprising from civil society which is hugely mobilised and extremely well-organised. President Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association agreement was the catalyst for a protest movement with far broader and deeper complaints. This feels like a game changer, as the movement pushes for reform and real change."*

CAP Reform

In November, MEPs finally signed off on the long awaited reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy. This paves the way for what some describe as a fairer and greener CAP for the period 2014 – 2020. But others cautioned against being too self-congratulatory, including SNP MEP Alyn Smith.

A member of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, who has played a key role in the CAP reform negotiations, Alyn took the floor in the final debate in the European Parliament.

Alyn commented: *"We have worked hard, we certainly have, and I am glad colleagues share my concern at this curate's egg of a reform. There are advances and it is useful to remember that we have made major steps forward for new entrants, ended slipper farming, increased coupled support for hill farming and support for small abattoirs, short supply chains, cooperation and animal health and welfare. There have been advances, especially in rural development, although almost all of them have been voluntary and poorly funded.*

"But this is not the reform it could have been and there are too many issues that have been parked. There is a real risk that the 'common' in the common agricultural policy will be less and less common depending upon the actions of the Member States and local authorities. Also, there are major question marks over the proportionality of penalties and the impact of delegated acts, so this is very far from being over. This is very much not the end of this story; many of these issues will come back to haunt us because we have not been as brave as I feel we needed to be. On balance I can accept the package, but this is far from over."

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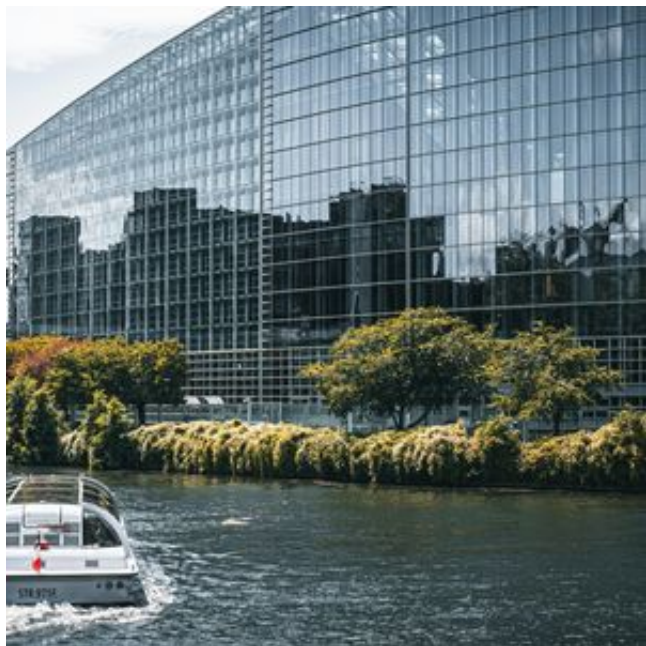


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