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e-fa: News Round-Up December 2011

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

December 2011 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 - U Partitu di a Nazione Corsa - Europe Ecologie
Oriol Junqueras MEP - Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
Alyn Smith MEP - Scottish National Party
Tatjana Ždanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia

Key issues this month include:

- Oriol to leave the European Parliament
- Western Sahara
- Jill in Copenhagen
- Sakharov Prize for Middle East freedom campaigners
- EU budget waste
- Phosphate free detergents
- Common Fisheries Policy

Oriol to leave the European Parliament

Esquerra Republicana MEP **Oriol Junqueras** is to stand down from the European Parliament at the end of this year. Oriol has been an MEP in the EFA group since the elections of 2009.

Earlier this year he was elected leader of his party and led ERC to a successful result at the recent Spanish state elections. A well known historian and broadcaster in Catalonia, Oriol has made his mark in the European Parliament as a member of the Culture committee, as well as the Industry and Research committee. He will be replaced by Ana Miranda of Bloque Nacionalista Galego.

Western Sahara

EFA MEPs welcomed the European Parliament's decision to reject a controversial agreement with Morocco. MEPs refused to extend the protocol to the EU Morocco Fisheries Agreement which undermines the status of occupied Western Sahara and is questionable under international law.

The Moroccan government responded by ordering all EU registered fishing boats to leave its waters immediately.

The agreement has allowed EU registered boats to continue fishing in Western Saharan waters, even though this territory has been under illegal occupation since the 1970s. MEPs are now calling on the European Commission to come up with a new agreement which recognises the rights of the people of Western Sahara to decide the future of their natural resources. The agreement is worth more than thirty five million euros.

EFA MEP **François Alfonsi** (PNC - Corsica) spoke in the earlier debate in the European Parliament. He commented: "The rejection of this protocol is a strong signal, given the detrimental environmental effects on notably overfished areas. It also sends a strong signal to the Moroccan government - at a time when Southern Mediterranean countries are waking to democracy - that it needs to take the path of reform and democracy, particularly in respect of the Saharawi people."

SNP MEP and Fisheries Committee member **Ian Hudghton** (Scotland) said: "Morocco has no right, under international law, to sell the natural resources of Western Sahara. It follows, therefore, that the EU should not be paying Morocco for fishing rights in the waters off Western Sahara."

N-VA MEP **Frieda Brepoels** (Flanders) welcomed the vote, saying: "The European Parliament has sent a powerful signal to the European Commission which is negotiating a new agreement with Morocco. It is totally unacceptable for international law to be trampled upon any longer. The European Parliament will not accept an agreement that fails to recognise the rights of the people of Western Sahara including the right to self-determination. The resident Saharawi people should once again be able to benefit from their natural and most important sources of income."

Jill in Copenhagen

In her capacity as Vice President of the Greens/EFA Group, Plaid MEP **Jill Evans** travelled to Copenhagen to meet new Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning Schmidt. The delegation from the Greens/EFA Group met Danish government representatives to discuss political priorities ahead of the Danish Presidency of the European Union which begins in January 2012 and runs for six months.

Sakharov Prize for Middle East freedom campaigners

Every year, the European Parliament awards its Sakharov prize for freedom of thought as a symbol in the struggle for human rights and democracy. This year's prize was awarded in December to five activists from Lybia, Egypt, Tunisia and Syria who'd been inspirations in their countries' uprising. Awarding the prize

was symbolic of the European Parliament's support for the desire for freedom and democracy in the region.

Flemish MEP **Frieda Brepoels** expressed her full support to the winners and for people everywhere who have the courage to speak out - "a crucial factor in bringing down totalitarian regimes in the Middle East."

EU budget wastes over a billion pounds on nuclear research

Plaid MEP **Jill Evans** criticised a deal on the EU budget which will give over a billion pounds to the controversial ITER nuclear fusion research project. MEPs voted to approve the deal which will take €1.3 billion from the EU budget over the next two years to fund the project's substantial budget over-run.

The Welsh MEP criticised the huge waste of public money when taxpayers in Wales and across Europe are facing hardship due to cuts in public spending.

Jill said: "With public spending and public services being slashed, people will rightly be angry that the European Union is wasting more than a billion pounds to bail out unproven and untested nuclear technology. The ITER nuclear fusion project, based in France, has been hugely controversial. It will not be commercially viable until 2050, if at all, and is proving enormously expensive. This money would be better spent investing in tidal, solar, wind and hydroelectric power and in promoting energy efficiency. Wales has huge potential for developing renewable energy and creating green jobs."

Phosphate free detergents backed

Flemish MEP **Frieda Brepoels** (N-VA) gave her backing to a new EU law that will restrict the use phosphates and other phosphorous compounds in household laundry detergents. MEPs in Strasbourg approved an agreement with the Council. This means that from June 2013 the use of phosphates will be limited in household laundry detergent, and this will apply to dishwashers from 2017.

Frieda welcomed the agreement: "A number of member states have already introduced regulations and many household detergents are now phosphate-free. So it's good news for the environment and for the internal market that we have common EU rules on this issue."

Common Fisheries Policy

The SNP's **Ian Hudghton** called for a fundamental rethink into key aspects of the Common Fisheries Policy. Ian made his comments as the Parliament held its first substantive debate following the publication of the Commission's proposals for fisheries management reform.

Ian highlighted the fact that the Commission is continuing to propose equal access for all EU fishermen to all waters and resources. The equal access clause has been a feature of the CFP since it was first established in 1983 and is considered fundamental by the European Commission. The Commission also accepts however that the CFP has completely failed since its inception.

Ian commented: "Scottish fishermen have made numerous sacrifices over the last few years and, indeed, many family businesses have called it a day. The hope is that, for those remaining in the industry, the sacrifices will bear fruit in the future. The Commission's insistence however that equal access to all waters and resources remains in the CFP can only threaten those hopes. The fear remains that the Scottish fleet's efforts will result in more fish in the sea - only for them to be fished out by an armada from elsewhere."

Action call on farm inputs

SNP MEP **Alyn Smith** praised the passage of his colleague, Green MEP, Jose Bove's report on farm input costs as a strong message that Europe's farmers demand action against their rising costs.

The report laid out startling evidence on the scale of the problem faced by farmers: input costs have risen by 60% over a decade for energy, by 80% for synthetic fertilisers, 30% for animal feed, 36% for machinery and 30% for seeds. At the same time, farm gate prices have increased by only 25%. Alyn successfully passed an amendment raising awareness of the problems of new entrants to farming.

Alyn said: "This excellent report exposes one of the key issues which farmers face, but one which does not always get the public's attention. It lays bare the shallowness of the analysis of DEFRA, who believe that as some commodity prices are rising, that things are looking up for farmers, who therefore have no long term need for direct payments or income support. In fact, even in sectors like beef where farm gate prices are rising, input costs such as feed and energy have been rising even faster, threatening what little margin they have. I think the time is long overdue for a serious investigation by the competition authorities into concentration of production for inputs and the existence of monopoly power."

Deportation of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia

On the 65th anniversary of the deportation of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia for forced labour, ERC MEP **Oriol Junqueras** hosted a public hearing with survivors and their descendants at the European Parliament. The hearing heard moving testimony and was held to try and shed light on an often ignored episode in European history. Speakers included PPE MEP György Schöpflin from Hungary and Mikulás Kivánsky for the Association of Deportation Victims and their descendants.

Green light for Croatia's EU membership

Welsh MEP **Jill Evans** welcomed the European Parliament's vote to give the green light for Croatia to join the European Union in 2013. EFA MEPs voted in favour of the legislation which was passed by a large majority.

The Plaid Cymru MEP commented: "We will welcome Croatia as the European Union's twenty eighth member in 2013. Croatia is an example of how a small, independent European nation can achieve its full potential as a member of the European Union. Independence in Europe will give Croatia full access to the European single market, helping boost trade. Full EU membership means real power and influence when key decisions are made at European level."

Jill Evans added: "Research I published earlier this year showed that Wales could have been almost forty per cent wealthier had we joined the EU as an independent nation some twenty years ago. I hope to see Wales taking its seat at Europe's top table in the coming years."

Croatia's EU accession treaty was signed in Brussels later in December.

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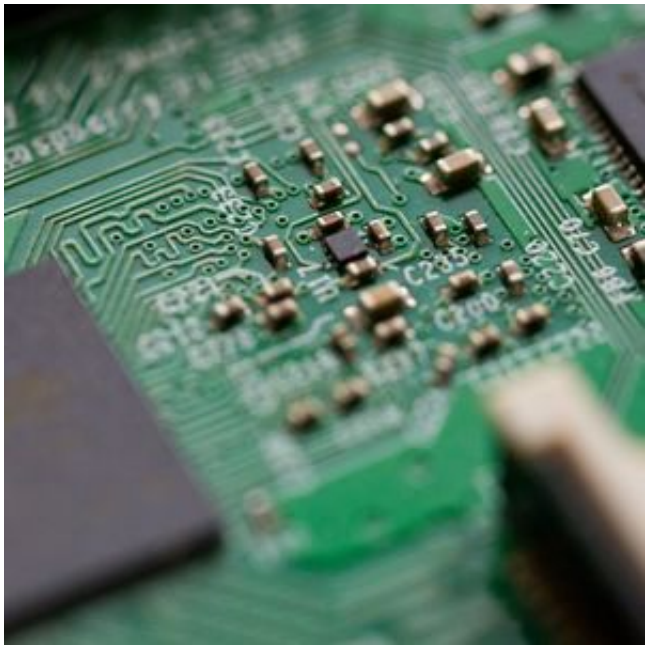


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Steven Cornelius

EFA Press, Communications & Campaigns Officer

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