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e-fa News Round-Up February 2010

News bulletin from the European Free Alliance Group

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

EFA MEPs are:

Jill Evans MEP - Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales (EFA Group President)
Ian Hudghton MEP - Scottish National Party (Vice-President)
Frieda Brepoels MEP - Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (Vice-President)
François Alfonsi - Partitu di a Nazione Corsa
Oriol Junqueras MEP - Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
Alyn Smith MEP - Scottish National Party
Tatjana Zdanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia

This week in Brussels: 22 - 25 February

- **Reforming the CFP**
- **Gaza conflict and the Goldstone report**
- **Forthcoming Conference on Language Diversity**
- **Basque Friendship Group in the European Parliament**
- **Route Map for Catalan in the EU institutions**

EFA MEPs have been in Brussels this week for a plenary session of the European Parliament. Subjects on the agenda included reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, responding to the Goldstone report into the Gaza war, reducing red tape for small companies and the Greek debt crisis.

Reforming the CFP

MEPs held a major debate on the Common Fisheries Policy which is due for reform over the coming years. The Lisbon Treaty makes fisheries policy an exclusive competence of the EU - a development vehemently opposed by the Scottish National Party. Speaking in the debate, the SNP's Ian Hudghton explained how experience had shown that local management of fisheries was proven to work best in terms of preserving fish stocks.

There was controversy on the eve of the vote when it emerged that the UK Government had sent a briefing to all MEPs claiming that allocating traditional rights to fishing communities "stifles innovative business and the ability to adapt to climate change". Ian Hudghton reacted angrily to the suggestion accusing the UK of 'betrayal'. Hudghton said: *"The UK government however seem intent on abandoning Scotland's traditional rights. After decades of sell-out by successive London governments, this is one final act of betrayal towards our coastal communities."*

Following the vote, the SNP MEP called on Scotland's fishing communities to unite in an effort to protect their historical fishing rights. Hudghton commented: *"There seems to be a consensus emerging across Europe that the CFP has failed and that the over-centralised system must be abandoned. Nevertheless, serious concerns must remain as to what will be put in its place. It is clear that rule by diktat from Brussels has not worked and that powers must be returned to Europe's fishing nations, co-operating with each other on a regional basis. This effectively entails enshrining each country's existing historical rights - and allowing decisions to be taken closer to where it matters."*

Gaza conflict and the Goldstone report

MEPs also debated the fall-out from the Gaza war of 2008-09. This follows a UN fact finding mission to the region that was led by former South African judge Richard Goldstone. The report produced by Goldstone called on both parties to the conflict to undertake credible investigations into human rights violations. N-VA MEP Frieda Brepoels spoke in the debate and called on the EU to do more to promote respect for international law in the region.

Speaking in parliament, Frieda said: *"The Goldstone report has clearly shown that both Israel and Hamas were responsible for human rights violations during the Gaza war. The UN has on two occasions called upon both parties to carry out independent investigations; fourteen months on, that call is still left up in the air.*

"Why doesn't the EU turn to international law? Why does it allow impunity to reign in the region? The credibility of and respect for international law seems lost if the EU chooses to turn a blind eye to war crimes. This report is not about the security of Israel, this is about gross human rights violations, and so there is absolutely no reason why the recommendations of this report should not be implemented.

"We call upon the High Representative and the Member States to undertake a through follow-up on the ground. This is also the only way of giving a restart to peace talks any chance of success."

Watch Frieda's speech in Parliament at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bymep&pageby=unit&idmep=28463&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=0

Forthcoming Conference on Language Diversity

Final preparations were being made this week for the EFA Group's Conference on Language Diversity

which will take place at the European Parliament in Brussels next Thursday 4 March.

More information can be found at http://www.greens-efa.org/cms/default/dok/325/325496.language_diversity@en.htm

Basque Friendship Group in the European Parliament

EFA MEPs Oriol Junqueras, François Alfonsi and Tatjana Zdanoka took part in a press conference this week to explain the work and priorities of the Basque Friendship Group in the European Parliament. This group was first set up during the 2004-2009 parliamentary term by MEPs from various political groups who wished to support the peace process in the Basque Country. The group has now been re-established.

All EFA MEPs are members, and the group published a statement which called on the Spanish state to engage in meaningful steps towards peace. In the statement, the group said: *"We ask all parties involved in the conflict to react responsibly and to engage in a process that will lead to peace talks so that the Basque people will be able to decide about their future, freely and without any kind of intimidation.*

"We ask the Spanish Government to act with responsibility, to engage itself in a democratic peace process and, as presidency of the Council of the EU, to encourage the involvement of EU Institutions in the promotion of the peaceful resolution of the last remaining armed conflict in the EU."

Route Map for Catalan in the EU institutions

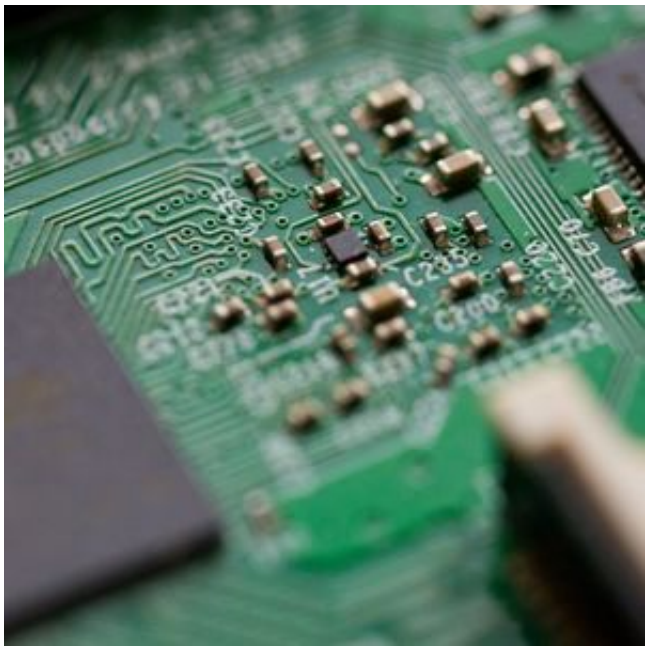
Esquerra MEP Oriol Junqueras hosted a press conference on Wednesday where the Catalan think-tank Horitzó Europa presented a road map for developing the use and promoting the status of the Catalan language in the European Union institutions. The initiative was also supported by other Catalan MEPs from various political groups.

The group set out how the use of Catalan in the EU institutions could be improved, particularly with reference to simultaneous translation in plenary sessions of the European Parliament. They said that full official status for Catalan could be achieved by as early as 2012. See www.horitzo.eu

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Steven Cornelius

EFA Press, Communications & Campaigns Officer

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