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e-fa News Round-Up January 2011

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 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 (Vice-President)
Frieda Brepoels MEP - Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (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 Zdanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia

On the agenda in January:

- Cross-border healthcare
- Basque peace process
- Kashgar: 'A Silk Road Oasis on the Brink of Extinction'
- Major retailers shunning Scottish meat
- Switzerland agreement good news for Scotland
- Calls for more EU action on Alzheimer's
- Referendums, elections and negotiations
- EU texts should be available in Dutch
- Towards a fourth wave of new states?

Cross-border healthcare

EFA MEPs supported new rules for cross-border healthcare which are designed to make life easier for patients. In mid January, the European Parliament backed the Directive which will clarify people's entitlement to healthcare abroad, whilst avoiding so-called 'healthcare tourism.'

Plaid MEP Jill Evans voiced her support, commenting: *"Most people prefer to get treatment as close to home as possible so this won't affect large numbers of patients, but it is important that people who do choose to go abroad rather than wait for treatment have the correct information, have proper protection and can take action if anything goes wrong."*

N-VA MEP Frieda Brepoels said that the new rules would mean an end to years of legal uncertainty for EU citizens who seek medical care in another Member State. *"The European Court of Justice has in the cases of various individual EU citizens confirmed the principle of patient mobility, but specific legislation has been lacking up to now,"* said Brepoels.

The SNP's Ian Hudghton was pleased that the rules had become more patient and less market focussed. Hudghton said: *"I voted for the removal of healthcare from the scope of the Services Directive some years ago, and I voted against the Cross-border Healthcare Directive at first reading. At the time, it was apparent that there was a tendency within the Commission to treat healthcare as a tradable commodity. That is not how I regard healthcare – patients should not be treated as mere paying consumers. The Council has, however, vastly improved the draft legislation and moved its legal basis away from being a purely internal market issue. I accordingly voted in favour of the report and am confident that it will improve patients' rights across Europe."*

Basque Peace process

There was a broad welcome for the announcement of a ceasefire by Basque group ETA made earlier in January. Several EFA MEPs are active members of the European Parliament's cross-party Basque Friendship Group set up five years ago to garner EU level support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.
L to R: MEPs Tatjana Zdanoka, Oriol Junqueras, François Alfonsi, Bairbre de Brun, Catherine Grèze.
At a press conference in Strasbourg the MEPs published a statement welcoming ETA's recent announcement of a ceasefire and called for the EU institutions to play an active role in resolving the conflict. The MEPs taking part were Oriol Junqueras (ERC, Catalonia), Bairbre de Brun (Sinn Fein, Ireland), François Alfonsi (PNC/Europe Ecologie), Tatjana Zdanoka (PCTVL, Latvia), Catherine Greze (Europe Ecologie).
Commenting on ETA's announcement of a 'permanent and general ceasefire, Catalan MEP Oriol Junqueras said: *"It would be a great pity were the Spanish Government to miss this chance for peace. Instead of dismissing ETA's permanent and verifiable ceasefire, the Spanish Government should work hard on it to build a true peace. Experience in resolution of international conflicts shows us that states have a major role to play and, in that respect, the Spanish Government should bring ETA prisoners to the Basque Country."*

Kashgar: 'A Silk Road Oasis on the Brink of Extinction'

The historic old city of Kashgar - renowned as an oasis on the Silk Road - faces destruction due to Chinese government redevelopment plans.
At the end of January Frieda Brepoels hosted a conference in collaboration with UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation) and the Belgian Uyghur Association to asses the damage and the implications for the region's Uyghur people. They looked at how international intervention could help save the old city.

Frieda commented: *"The destruction of the historic old town of Kashgar is an attack on the identity and rich culture of the Uyghur minority in China."* Later at a press conference, participants called for the EU to support moves to have the old city of Kashgar listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
For more information visit www.unpo.org/article/12104

Major retailers shunning Scottish meat

The SNP's Alyn Smith expressed disappointment recently that major retailers are remaining complacent about stocking Scottish meat on their shelves. This followed an investigation by National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) that looked at the country of origin of meat on supermarket shelves.
Alyn commented: *"This is a shocking find by NFUS. At a time when Scotland's producers are facing record input costs, we are seeing supermarkets stacking their shelves with meat from the Netherlands, Denmark, France and even further afield.*
"The supermarkets are telling us that they don't need a code of conduct, and they don't need legislation, but nothing they are doing supports this point of view and instead they quietly reap the benefits of a price collapse on the continent."

Switzerland agreement good news for Scotland

A new agreement between the EU and Switzerland to safeguard distinctive national products will be good news for Scotland's economy according to SNP MEP Ian Hudghton.
The EU and Switzerland recently completed an agreement to safeguard each other's Geographical Indications for agricultural products and food. This is especially significant for Scotland given that Switzerland is regularly amongst the top ten export destinations for Scottish produce.
Welcoming the agreement, Ian said: *"Switzerland has been an important export market for Scottish produce for a number of years and this agreement will help consolidate that partnership. It will mean additional safeguards and protection in Swiss markets for Scottish produce that enjoys EU protection through the Geographical Indications arrangements.*
"Switzerland is consistently amongst our top ten export destinations and was worth about half a billion to the Scottish economy in 2009. This agreement will help us build upon an important and valuable trading relationship."

Calls for more EU action on dementia care

MEPs debated a report on care for people with dementia earlier in January. There were calls for increased co-operation, and better prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care of people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.
Frieda Brepoels is Vice Chair of the Alzheimer Alliance in the European Parliament. Speaking in Parliament, Frieda welcomed the report and its call for better co-ordination.
Frieda said: *"Prevention and early diagnosis are critical. Awareness campaigns about first symptoms are essential so that patients and their carers can benefit from the treatment and support that's already available. But the importance of an EU wide programme of research cannot be emphasised enough. The vast majority of public investment in dementia research happens without any EU level co-ordination and this leads to unnecessary duplication. A joint research programme would help improve the treatment and care of those with dementia."*

An estimated ten million people in Europe have some form of dementia, with Alzheimer's being the most common form. **Referendums, elections and negotiations** The coming months will see exciting constitutional developments in EFA MEPs home countries. One example is a referendum on Catalan Independence, scheduled for April 10th 2011 in Barcelona. At the invitation of Catalan MEP Oriol Junqueras, representatives of the *'Barcelona Decedeix'* organisation came to Brussels in early January to

talk about their initiative and invited international observers to Barcelona for the poll.
L to R: MEPs Ramon Tremosa, Oriol Junqueras, Raul Romeva with representatives of Barcelona Decedeix
The referendum has been organised by grassroots movements because the Spanish state does not allow a vote on self-determination. More than 500 towns all over Catalonia have already held such polls and voting is open to all residents, including non-enfranchised immigrants and young people aged 16-18. Results have been successful all over, and more than 600,000 people have cast their votes so far.
In Wales, voters go to the polls on Thursday 3 March when they'll be asked to decide whether the National Assembly for Wales should be given full legislative powers. This would give the Welsh Assembly similar powers to the Scottish parliament. Campaigners are urging people in Wales to support the principle that laws only affecting Wales should be decided in Wales. Opinion polling has shown consistent support for a 'Yes' vote. Wales - and Scotland - will go the polls once more on 5 May for elections to the National Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. EFA parties Plaid Cymru and the SNP are in government in both countries. In Belgium, a federal government has yet to be formed more than seven months after elections which saw N-VA emerge as the largest party. Recent efforts to break the deadlock have failed and a mediator appointed by the King resigned recently. Should no new government be formed by 17 February, Belgium will reportedly hold the world record for a country being the longest time without a government. Parties are unable to agree on a programme that would see a further transfer of powers to the regional level and greater budgetary discipline. **EU texts should be available in Dutch** Frieda Brepoels has expressed concerns at the failure of EU institutions to consistently make information available in the Dutch language. In January, Frieda raised two specific cases where this had happened. First was the case of OpenAIRE, an EU Commission initiative to publish online the results of EU-financed research. There was surprise that this website wasn't available in all official EU languages. In a second example, Frieda complained about the EU's failure to make important legislation available online in all official languages, as required by law. The N-VA MEP highlighted the absence of Dutch language versions of important pieces of legislation from the EUR-Lex online legislation library. Raising the first issue with EU Commissioner Neelie Kroes, Frieda was able to secure a commitment that the website would be translated into Dutch. In reply to a separate letter from Frieda, the EU publications office acknowledged the problem which they committed to solving before the end of the year. Dutch speakers can read more about these issues on Frieda's website www.friedabrepoels.eu **Towards a fourth wave of new states?**

A seminar organised by Esquerra Republicana MEP Oriol Junqueras considered an international study, with 32 participants from 21 universities which concludes that there are high possibilities for the emergence of new states in the current context, which could lead to a fourth wave of independence being observed in the not too distant future.
The study *'Enlarging democracy in Europe. New Statehoods and processes of sovereignty'* examines the latest new states which emerged in the 1990s and the countries with strong claims for a new generation of statehoods (new institutional formulae, including secession) and concludes that there is a small group of stateless nations at the heart of the OECD (Quebec, Scotland, Flanders, the Basque Country and Catalonia) which share a series of elements making them unique in the 'race to independence'.
They all had their own institutions (legislative power) during the modern age, they are societies which do not belong to the majority or dominant culture of the parent state of which they form part (they have, for example, their own language and/or a different religion) and they currently enjoy very high levels of decentralisation (they have their own legislative power within the parent state).
The international comparative study was sponsored by the Centre d'Estudis de Temes Contemporanis. Fifteen experts from a dozen universities worked on the data collection process, and 17 lecturers from 21 universities collaborated on the final assessments.

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Responsible MEPs



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