EFA logo

en

News | 08.07.2010

e-fa News Round-Up July 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 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 - U 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 Strasbourg: 5 - 8 July:

- EFA in Latvia
- Intelligent Transport Systems
- EIB investment in Scotland's Green Future
- Improved passenger rights
- EU Cohesion Policy
- Belgian EU Presidency
- No to meat from cloned animals
- Iceland's EU membership

EFA MEPs have been in Strasbourg this week for a plenary session of the European Parliament. Subjects on the agenda included improved rights for passengers in boat, coach and bus travel, Belgium's EU Presidency and Iceland's bid for EU membership.

EFA in Latvia

EFA President and Plaid MEP Jill Evans thanked Tatjana Zdanoka for welcoming the group on a visit to Latvia last week. The visit included a conference in Riga on multilingualism, talks at the Latvian parliament and a visit to the hydroelectric power plant at Aizkraukle.

EFA MEPs pictured with Deputy Speaker Solvita Aboltine (centre) following their meeting at the Saeima (Latvian Parliament).

Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)

N-VA MEP Frieda Brepoels took the floor during Monday evening's debate in parliament on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). The following day, Parliament backed a second reading agreement. It's hoped that greater interoperability will help cut CO2 emissions.

Speaking in the debate Frieda said: *"I am of course delighted that a European framework for ITS may finally be adopted. It was, as my colleagues have said, a hard nut to crack. Problems of congestion and pollution will only increase and so the importance of this initiative should not be underestimated. There is clearly a need for innovative solutions. But why is this approach at European level so important? It's because the potential of ITS will only be fully realised when the different fragmented systems in operation in the various member states are effectively co-ordinated at European level."*

EIB investment in Scotland's Green Future

SNP MEP Alyn Smith welcomed new EU investment in green homes for Scotland. The money is the first tranche of a groundbreaking new EU programme to encourage development of green homes, renewing derelict sites and stimulating green urban renewal.

Alyn commented: *"This really is good news and will allow us to kick on green technologies where they really matter, in the homes of our citizens. Too many EU funded projects have not quite achieved the objectives set for them, but many of the European Investment Bank projects have been particularly useful in matching a degree of private sector expertise with the public policy priorities, and this project is genuinely groundbreaking.*

"Scotland is well known already as Europe's potential green powerhouse, but in public policy terms much of the bang for buck we can achieve short term is in kicking on energy efficiency, better insulation and better building standards. Too many Scottish homes are poorly insulated, meaning our people are hit with a double whammy of high fuel costs and high carbon emissions. This money will go towards ensuring that higher standards are met, as well as integrating transport and social housing. There is nothing here to dislike."

Improved passenger rights

The SNP's Ian Hudghton welcomed a vote in favour of better rights for disabled passengers. A majority of MEPs voted in favour of a new EU regulation covering the rights of passengers in boat, bus and coach transport. The new rules will apply to boat passengers (including cruise ships) from 2012, and MEPs are pushing hard to get bus and coach passengers included in the legislation from the same date.

The new European rules will ban operators from using disability as a reason to deny passengers the right to board a ship, and will guarantee free assistance to disabled passengers in ports, provided notice is given at the time of booking or at least 48 hours before travel. It's hoped that the same principle will also apply to bus and coach passengers. Exceptions will be made for small passenger boats (less than 12 passengers) and certain types of excursion and sightseeing boats. If operators are unable to provide assistance then disabled passengers will be entitled to have someone travel with them.

Commenting after the vote Ian said: *"This is good news for travellers with disabilities or limited mobility who deserve to be treated fairly by transport operators. As things stand, we know that from 2012 any disabled boat passenger will have improved rights, including a guarantee of the right to board and free assistance in the port. I am very hopeful that we will be able to get bus and coach passengers included in a balanced agreement that will be good for passengers and operators. This is a very welcome step towards addressing practical impediments faced by disabled passengers."*

EU Cohesion Policy

Plaid Cymru MEP Jill Evans welcomed Wednesday's National Assembly for Wales report on the future of the European Union's cohesion policy calling it, "a boost to the campaign to retain European regional funding." The report states clearly that Wales will continue to need more support from European structural funds when the next funding round starts in 2013.

Published by the Assembly's European and External Affairs Committee, the report backs an EU wide cohesion policy that gives continued support on the basis of need and transitional support for those parts of Europe moving out of the lowest levels of poverty. It also 'utterly rejects' the idea of 'renationalisation' of cohesion policy, or in other words, giving funding responsibility back to the member state.

Jill said: *"European regional money has been essential to Wales because it is targeted at areas of poverty. But the hundreds of millions of pounds we have received already were not used wisely early on in the programme. It is shocking that West Wales and the Valleys could qualify for European money again because we still have some of the poorest areas in the whole of Europe. But that is how it looks at the moment so my main concern is getting the best deal for Wales and, if we qualify, ensuring we get the maximum amount of funding possible."*

Belgian EU Presidency

Frieda Brepoels (N-VA) called for the debate on institutional reform with the EU to continue during the Belgian EU Presidency even though the circumstances surrounding its start 'are not ideal'. Brepoels was speaking in the European Parliament's debate on the priorities for Belgium's six month European Council Presidency which began on 1 July. Outgoing Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme took part in the debate as did European Commission President José Manuel Barroso.

Speaking in the debate Frieda said: *"The circumstances surrounding the start of this presidency may not be ideal, but they do give an opportunity to focus on the true mission of a presidency under the new institutional rules. I do see another opportunity to steer the institutional debate, not just in Belgium but also in other EU states. Globalisation has led to a debate on the role of nation states. As Europe gains more powers, so can more powers be transferred to Flanders, Wallonia, Scotland, Catalonia, Corsica, Wales and so on. This is a natural process that reflects the reality of today's EU. It's completely logical that these nations should claim their place at the European table where they can play an important role in aiding the economic recovery.*

"During this Presidency, Ministers from 'regional' level will also chair various Council meetings, including education, sport, fisheries, environment, regional policy and so on. This could well provide the impetus for the very necessary and far more extensive multi-level governance of the European Union."

See Frieda's speech 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

No to meat from cloned animals

Food from cloned animals should be banned according to MEPs. Plaid MEP Jill Evans has been campaigning for such a ban since 2008. The proposed new legislation would cover meat and dairy products from cloned animals as part of EU rules on so-called 'novel foods'. Restrictions would also apply to any foods produced using nanotechnology.

Commenting after a vote in Strasbourg, Jill said: *"A complete ban would be good news for consumers and for our agricultural industry. MEPs have given their support and now it's up to EU governments to get behind the proposals. Support for a complete ban on food produced from cloned animals has been growing steadily since this issue was first raised at EU level two years ago.*

"The health and welfare problems associated with cloned animals have been well documented, as has their higher mortality rate. It's vitally important that we get this ban in place soon, before the situation develops to such a stage where these products could reach the food chain. I hope that EU governments will now heed the call by the Parliament and agree on this issue so that a ban can be in place as soon as possible."

Iceland's EU membership

SNP MEP Ian Hudghton criticised moves to force Iceland to radically alter its approach to fisheries policy as part of its bid for EU membership. The SNP MEP also called for urgent talks between the EU and Iceland about current problems in the Mackerel fishery. MEPs debated Iceland's EU membership application in detail. Whilst supportive of the bid, Mr Hudghton criticised a detailed resolution which sought to put pressure on Iceland to 'adopt Fisheries policy measures that will allow it to make the transition towards introduction of the Common Fisheries Policy' as part of its membership negotiations.

The Scots MEP criticised the 'contradictory' approach, arguing that the EU would do better to learn from Iceland's successful management of its marine resources rather than conforming with the current failed Common Fisheries Policy. MEPs backed formal membership negotiations taking place with Iceland which has had a free trade agreement with the EU since 1973.

Commenting on the issue, Ian Hudghton said: *"There is broad support for Iceland's EU membership bid, which I'm sure will be successful, if that is the will of the Icelandic people. But it is certainly not for the EU to start dictating terms to Iceland, that kind of approach would be completely counter-productive. I hope that the membership negotiations will be constructive, and that the EU will keep an open mind. This is particularly true concerning the Common Fisheries Policy which has been a dismal failure. I suspect that Brussels has more to learn from Reykjavik about fisheries management than vice versa."*

See Ian's speech at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bymep&pageby=unit&idmep=2338&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=0

Recommended

Press release

KOBU Agency

Enlargement: New incentives and rules for candidate co…

06.10.2026

Press release

©Les Films de l'Europe

[New Co-Presidents Terry Reintke and Nicolae Ştefănuţă …]

06.10.2026

Press release

© Eva Serrabassa

[Data centres: Tech companies must no longer be allowed…]

21.09.2026

Press release

[Historic: Canada answers Europe’s call for closer coop…]

17.09.2026

Responsible MEPs

Jill Evans

Member

Ian Hudghton

Member

Heather Anderson

Member

Contact person

Steven Cornelius

EFA Press, Communications & Campaigns Officer

Please share

- E-Mail