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e-fa News Round-Up June 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 - 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: 14 - 17 June:

* **Gefeliciteerd Frieda!**
* **Translation in criminal proceedings abroad**
* **Aquaculture Strategy**
* **Food Labelling**

EFA MEPs have been in Strasbourg this week for a plenary session of the European Parliament. Subjects on the agenda included rules to provide for interpretation for people caught up in legal proceedings in another EU country, and food labelling. EFA members also took the time to congratulate Frieda Brepoels and the N-VA on their stunning election result in last Sunday's Belgian federal elections.

Gefeliciteerd Frieda!

EFA MEPs congratulated Frieda Brepoels on the N-VA's stunning performance in last Sunday's Belgian Federal Elections which saw the party emerge as the largest single party. There was particular praise for Frieda's own performance in the election - topping the poll in Limburg with over 43,000 personal preference votes. The party took over 28% of the popular vote, more than ten points ahead of their nearest rivals, and take 27 seats in the Federal Parliament, an increase of 19.

Plaid MEP and President of the EFA Group Jill Evans congratulated Frieda and the N-VA (New Flemish Alliance): *"This is an historic result for Flanders and for Europe. The N-VA put forward a programme of change which was received enthusiastically by the Flemish people. Their message of moving to greater self government for Flanders within a confederal Belgium clearly has huge support.*

"The European Union must respond positively to the exciting developments taking place in Flanders and in Belgium. With the Belgian Presidency of the EU about to begin we are looking forward to the discussions on Flanders in Europe. I congratulate the N-VA on their wonderful election result."

For more on the N-VA see www.n-va.be

More on the results at www.standaard.be/extra/verkiezingen/

Translation in criminal proceedings abroad

New EU legislation to guarantee the right to translation in criminal proceedings in other member states was approved by the European Parliament this week. EFA MEP and Civil Liberties Committee Member Tatjana Zdanoka welcomed the development but speaking in the debate in parliament said she hoped that EU member states would accept that the new rules extended beyond the official EU languages to include minority and non-official languages of the European Union.

Parliament's rapporteur (the MEP responsible for steering the legislation through parliament) Baroness Ludford has said that defining which languages would be covered would be left to the member states.

Tatjana Zdanoka commented: *"It's clear that the scope of this directive could and should apply to non-official or minority languages. There is consensus that people involved in criminal proceedings abroad should be able to understand those proceedings. For that to happen they must be allowed translation in their own language - that's to say the language in which they are most comfortable. Otherwise they will be put at a disadvantage.*

"Politics shouldn't come into this. Everyone has the right to a fair trial and to be treated fairly by the justice system wherever they come into contact with it. With this in mind, it should be incumbent on EU countries to allow translation in languages like Catalan, Russian, Welsh or Basque for those who find themselves caught up in the legal system whilst abroad."

See Tatjana's intervention in the debate at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bymep&pageby=unit&idmep=28619&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=1

Aquaculture Strategy

SNP MEP Ian Hudghton called on the EU to avoid red tape and centralisation which would be damaging for Scotland's aquaculture production as plans were discussed in Strasbourg for an EU Aquaculture Strategy. MEPs were debating a report from the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee. Ian

highlighted the importance of aquaculture in Scotland supporting fragile island and rural communities and urged MEPs to learn from the failure of the Common Fisheries Policy and avoid centralising management of aquaculture policy at EU level.

Speaking in the debate, Ian said: *"Scotland succeeds at high quality aquaculture production because our natural environment, our clean waters, are well suited to fish and shellfish farming. It is self evident that that environment must be protected.*

"Aquaculture in Scotland supports fragile island and rural communities with substantial numbers of jobs in the processing sector. If we are to develop a new EU strategy for aquaculture we should focus on simplification and streamlining of regulation. What we must not do is centralise management and control at EU level. Let us learn from the failure of the CFP in that regard. Scotland has its own Strategic Framework for Aquaculture which should be supported by the European Union as and where appropriate."

Food Labelling

The European Parliament this week voted for a better system of food labelling. Plaid MEP Jill Evans has been campaigning for clearer labelling to make it easier for consumers to understand which products are high in fat, sugar, salt and calories.

Commenting on the outcome, Jill said: *"I have long campaigned for clear food labelling so we can be sure the products we buy are exactly what it says on the pack. For example, people wanting to buy Welsh meat must be sure that the produce really is Welsh. We voted today for labelling meat with it's 'country of origin' - meaning the country of birth, rearing and slaughter – so consumers can be sure its Welsh. This is very important too, to farmers and the meat industry in Wales."*

"People in Wales are bombarded with food adverts that can lead to confusion and poor eating choices. It is vital that consumers are given simple information about the food they buy. This is not just a matter of consumers' rights, but it also important to health. In Wales 57% of adults and 33% of children are estimated to be overweight or obese, with obesity being one of the top preventable deaths in Wales."

But Jill was disappointed that MEPs rejected proposals for a 'traffic light' system of food labelling. She said: *"I was disappointed that the "traffic light" system, which is the most effective way to label food was rejected. I had many letters from constituents in Wales on this, and I will continue to campaign for our right to use "traffic light" labels in Wales."*

SNP MEP Alyn Smith also welcomed the result: *"This was a tricky vote, but on balance the report is a step forward for transparency and consumer power so we backed it, even if we would have liked to have seen tougher standards. It was a shame in particular that the Traffic Light information system did not survive the vote as certainly I have had a great deal of lobbying on the issue from consumers who want to see it introduced."*

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Responsible MEPs

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Ian Hudghton

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Member

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