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e-fa News Round-Up March 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 Ždanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia Key issues in March included:

- **EFA Cohesion Policy Conference**
- **Fish discards further discredit CFP**
- **Cantonal elections in France**
- **Tourism policy**
- **The Mapuche in Chile**
- **Sortu and the Basque Peace Process**
- **EU food safety agency future questioned**
- **Moves to end Strasbourg travelling circus**
- **Kidney health**
- **International Women's Day - EU must do more to tackle inequality**
- **Kashgar**

EFA Cohesion Policy Conference

EFA MEPs published a ten point statement of principles about the future direction of EU Cohesion

Policy after 2013.

Europe's cohesion policy is designed to reduce regional disparities in income, wealth and opportunity. The budget for cohesion funding alone amounts to more than seventy billion euros in the period 2007 - 2013. EFA MEPs reject the suggestion of handing control over cohesion policy to member state governments (or 'renationalising' as it is known).

At a conference in Brussels sectoral experts from countries including Scotland, Flanders, Wales, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Corsica and Latvia highlighted innovative examples of best practice in delivering projects at a local level, with an emphasis on the decentralised approach. All of EFA's seven MEPs took part.

The statement also calls on the EU to ensure that the next reform of EU Cohesion Policy should uphold the principles of multilevel governance, bottom-up approach, partnership, integrated approach, result orientation, gender mainstreaming, additionality, transparency.

Jill Evans (Plaid) said: *"We are currently in talks which will determine the future shape of EU funding after 2013. European funding has been invaluable in supporting jobs and companies, and in helping people find further work or learning opportunities. It's also important that we can create more green, sustainable jobs which can enhance the skills of the local work force."*

Frieda Brepoels (N-VA, Flanders) said: *"Projects that were highlighted as good examples at this conference, such as the Flemish National Park of Hoge Kempen, show that European cohesion policy is not only a policy that is primarily focussed towards specific regions, but that it remains useful for all regions in the European Union."*

More information at <http://www.greens-efa.eu/sharing-experience-3637.html>

Fish discards further discredit CFP

Ian Hudghton (SNP - Scotland) condemned the European Commission for attempting to maintain rules which require Scottish fishermen to throw marketable fish back into the sea.

The Commission has recently gained much press coverage for stating that it intends to eliminate the practice of discarding fish in EU waters. But at the same time they are attempting to extend emergency measures which require fishermen to discard vast quantities of fish.

The Scottish government have attempted to modify the rules to reduce discards but the Commission are intent on retaining the current failed system until 2013.

Ian commented: *"Public outrage has forced the Commission to acknowledge the discards problem and in recent weeks they've indicated that they'll do something about it. The Commission however seems to have failed the very first test. In seeking to extend supposedly emergency measures by a further 18 months they are ensuring that fishermen will have to stick to the same failed policies until at least the end of next year."*

Cantonal elections in France

EFA parties scored well in recent French cantonal elections. MEP François Alfonsi has been

campaigning in support of many EFA parties, and the hard work paid off with candidates such as Jean Christophe Angelini of the Party of the Corsican Nation (PNC) being elected to represent Porto-Vecchio, Corsica.

Angelini received 54% of the vote on a turnout of over 75%, and defeated a high profile candidate from French President Sarkozy's party who is also President of the Corsican Assembly, and who followed his father as a representative of the area. He had first been elected in 1949.

Tourism Policy

Frieda Brepoels (N-VA, Flanders) organised a successful evening seminar in the European Parliament on tourism policy. The meeting looked at areas of good practice from Flanders, including accessible tourism and sustainable tourism. The meeting also featured a contribution from Geert Bourgeois, Flanders' Minister for Tourism.

The Mapuche in Chile

Oriol Junqueras (ERC - Catalonia) and Ana Miranda (BNG - Galicia) organised a conference at the European Parliament to examine the question of the Mapuche people in Chile.

The meeting was a response to allegations of ongoing human rights violations in Chile, inappropriate use of the antiterrorism law and the renewed hunger strike of Mapuche activists. Discussion focussed on the current situation facing Mapuche, and future EU-Chile cooperation.

Oriol Junqueras commented that *"cooperation between indigenous representatives, MEPs and the EU is key for improving the situation."* Ana Miranda noted that 38 MEPs have already signed a letter of support for the Mapuche, and that they hope to gather broader support in the European Parliament in their *"continued efforts to seek justice for the Mapuche people."*

Sortu and the Basque Peace Process

The decision of Spain's Constitutional Court to refuse registration of new Basque left wing party Sortu in March was greeted with dismay by many supporters of the Basque Peace process.

Earlier a group of MEPs including EFA's François Alfonsi, Frieda Brepoels, Tatjana Ždanoka, Alyn Smith and Oriol Junqueras signed up to a cross-party statement supporting Sortu's legalisation as a means of helping build a lasting peace.

The statement noted that whilst not necessarily supporting the group's political aims

"we understand that such a political party has the same right to be legal and contest elections as any other party. We call on the Spanish authorities not to put any additional barriers. We understand that for a resolute dialogue to be set up, all the parties should take part on equal conditions, and so the Abertzale Left should be legalised."

They called on all parties involved to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

EU food safety agency future questioned

Jill Evans (Plaid, Wales) welcomed a decision by the Parliament's Petitions Committee in mid-March to call for an investigation into the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA).

The decision follows two petitions submitted by Dr Brian John of anti-GMO campaign organisation GM Free Cymru and supported by Jill. MEPs heard serious questions raised about EFSA's impartiality in taking decisions in respect of authorising GMOs.

Moves to end Strasbourg travelling circus

Alyn Smith (SNP - Scotland) welcomed legal action by France against the European Parliament over the Strasbourg commute, which MEPs voted to slightly curtail in a vote over next year's calendar. France has reportedly lodged papers with the European Court of Justice claiming the move is illegal, commencing a legal case which Alyn believes will bring the wasteful nature of the parliament's monthly trek to Strasbourg into the open.

MEPs are obliged to meet twelve times a year in Strasbourg. In early March MEPs voted in a secret to merge two of next year's sessions into one week in October, yet retain two sessions. This would save money, staff time and carbon emissions, and allow MEPs to be more efficient and effective.

Alyn Smith said: *"The European Parliament is unique in that we have no power over where we hold our sessions beyond a cosmetic power to set our own calendar. These moves to merge two sessions next year were deliberately testing the limits of that power and France taking us to court shows, in sharp relief, how France will stop at nothing to keep us in Strasbourg regardless of the cost or the fact it makes us look daft in the eyes of our voters."*

Kidney health

Frieda Brepoels supported calls for greater EU action to curb the increasing burden of chronic kidney disease and similar diseases. Frieda is a member of the MEP Group for Kidney Health and in Strasbourg with other MEPs met with top kidney experts on World Kidney Day - 10 March 2011 to draw attention to the issue.

Frieda said: *"Unfortunately, the fact that we are still confronted with so many people on dialysis, or on the waiting list for a donor organ, proves to a certain extent the inherent failure of our public health system. Transplantation is the last resort for people with chronic kidney disease."*

"The Parliament's recent work on quality and safety of transplantation and on the availability of donor organs has been important, but it is not enough. We should also focus on how we can prevent European citizens from needing transplantation in the first place."

International Women's Day - EU must do more to tackle inequality

On International Women's Day (Tuesday 8 March) MEPs Jill Evans (Wales) and Frieda Brepoels (Flanders) called for more focussed action at EU level to tackle inequality and eliminate poverty.

The European Parliament in Strasbourg held a special debate to mark the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. MEPs discussed the ongoing need to close the gender pay gap and raise the number of women in employment. Parliamentarians also heard that 17% of all women in the EU continue to live in poverty.

Jill Evans (Plaid Cymru, Wales), said: *"The European Union can and should do far more to tackle ongoing inequalities between men and women, particularly in terms of equal pay and eliminating poverty. As a group we will continue to support the contribution, experience and participation of women in every sphere of life - in the economy, politics, culture, peace processes and decision making."*

Frieda Brepoels (N-VA, Flanders), said: *"Effectively tackling labour market inequalities between men and women can have a very positive effect in promoting economic growth. We know that if employment and productivity rates for women could be raised to a similar level to those of men, then we would see a substantial increase in GDP across the EU. This isn't simply a matter of principle, it is especially important during this time of economic hardship when promoting greater equality would bring real economic benefits."*

Kashgar

At Frieda's initiative the European Parliament debated and adopted a resolution on the situation in Kashgar. This historic old city - renowned as an oasis on the Silk Road - faces destruction due to Chinese government redevelopment plans.

Speaking in the debate Frieda said: *"At a conference on Kashgar hosted by myself in January, I was able to see at first hand the effect of Chinese urban development plans on the Uyghur people. Under the excuse of public safety and modernisation, China wants to preserve 15% of the original city and turn Kashgar into an open air museum. Tourism may be saved, but local identity will be obliged to give way in the name of greater Chinese unity."*

The European Parliament's resolution made several demands of the Chinese authorities, including an immediate stop to the cultural destruction threatening Kashgar's architectural survival and to all forced resettlement and social marginalisation of Kashgar's Uyghur population.

The committee heard that public opposition to GM crops now stands at 61% across Europe according to recent polls.

Jill said: *"Very serious concerns have been raised about EFSA's impartiality and its decision making process in respect of GMO authorisations. I'm very pleased that the European Parliament's Petitions Committee has decided that this warrants further investigation. We have asked the Environment Committee to look into the concerns that have been raised. We will also be writing to EFSA to request urgent clarification on the more serious points."*

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Responsible MEPs



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