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e-fa News Round-Up October 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 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

This month, EFA MEPs have been in Strasbourg and Brussels for committee meetings and plenary sessions of the European Parliament.

Important issues for EFA MEPs this month have included:

- **Future of regional funding**
- **Deep sea oil drilling**
- **Tackling Chronic Disease**
- **Parental Leave**
- **Future of EU Budget**
- **Turkey's human rights violations**
- **European Diplomatic Service**
- **Moldova - progress towards reforms**

Future of regional funding

Earlier this month the European Parliament discussed the future of EU regional funding after 2014 - a vital issue for many EFA members. MEPs rejected calls to hand back power over the funding to the Member States - which would jeopardise the funding that areas such as Wales receive.

Plaid MEP Jill Evans commented: *"These funds are crucial to transform Wales' economy. I am pleased that the Parliament has sent clear messages to the Commission and the Council on keeping the current objectives of the funding. We have rejected the attempt to renationalise funds to the member states - handing back control to the UK government would jeopardise Wales receiving this funding. We have also called for cohesion funding to remain independent - separate of other European policies to ensure we get the maximum amount of funding possible. We will have to wait another month to see what the Commission will propose for Cohesion after 2014."*

Corsican MEP François Alfonsi called on the EU to set a 'long-term horizon for European cohesion policy.' He argued that the current qualifying threshold of 75% of average GDP was too low and proposed a threshold of 90% in the longer term. Alfonsi also argued that the funds could be used to promote Europe's cultural diversity as well as promoting social cohesion and helping in the fight against climate change.

See François speak in the debate at www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bymep&pageby=unit&idmep=96750&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=1

Deep sea oil drilling ban rejected

A majority of MEPs voted against calls for an EU-wide moratorium on deep sea oil drilling - a move seen by many as a disproportionate, knee-jerk reaction to the Gulf of Mexico disaster. The European Commission later watered down its original proposals.

EU Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger later (13 October) announced proposals for a voluntary rather than compulsory halt to deep sea drilling, and with the decision left to individual EU member states.

The move was welcomed by SNP President Ian Hudghton, who said: *"I'm pleased that common sense seems to have prevailed. The Commissioner is wise to heed the European Parliament vote where we clearly rejected calls for a deep sea drilling moratorium. We made clear during those discussions that Scotland's oil industry has a first rate safety record and operates to the highest standards. It would have been foolish to put jobs at risk in a knee-jerk reaction to the Gulf of Mexico disaster."*

Following the European Parliament vote (7 October), SNP colleague Alyn Smith reflected: *"There are lessons to be learned from the US Deepwater Horizon tragedy, and we will learn them. We have an ongoing job to reassure our European colleagues that our standards are indeed as high as they need to be. The next step is working with the governments of Europe to ensure that the new safety proposals lead to high standards across the continent. I have no doubt that as world leaders in offshore safety, there will be Scottish experts and companies at the forefront of these efforts."*

Commitment sought to tackle chronic disease

EFA MEP and Chair of the MEP Group for Kidney Health, Frieda Brepoels took part in a joint initiative with other MEPs to call for more action to tackle chronic disease (5 October).

The cross-party initiative argued that four major health determinants - tobacco, poor diet, alcohol and lack of physical activity - account for most chronic illness and death in Europe. They said that addressing chronic diseases will allow Europeans to live longer and healthier lives, stay longer in the workforce and contribute to reversing the alarming negative labour force growth which is predicted for 2020.

"Chronic diseases are largely preventable and in this respect the European Parliament has a major role to play. A higher investment in prevention is needed, in particular by raising awareness about common risk factors and promoting healthy lifestyles" said Frieda Brepoels. In a joint statement the MEPs called upon the member states to urgently develop and improve policies aimed at tackling chronic diseases.

The group referred to statistics which show that:

* Chronic non-communicable diseases kill 86% of all people in the WHO European Region.
* Cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, diabetes, kidney and liver diseases account for more than 40% the disease burden in Europe.
* Heart disease, stroke and diabetes alone are projected to lead to loss of national income in the billions, e.g. almost $33 billion in the United Kingdom (from 2005 to 2015).

Parental Leave

Voting in Strasbourg (20 October), a majority of MEPs voted to extend fully paid maternal leave to twenty weeks across the EU, with two weeks fully paid paternal leave.

Plaid MEP Jill Evans was supportive of the move. Speaking after the vote in Strasbourg Jill said: *"By supporting decent rules, MEPs have voted to help overcome the barriers to women having children and continuing to work. This in itself is an investment in our future and will help to invigorate the economy at a time when we need it most."*

But other MEPs sounded a more cautious note. SNP MEP Alyn Smith said: *"I want to see the people of Scotland with the best maternity and paternity rights in the world, but I want to see that agreed on a sustainable basis by the domestic authorities after a national debate, not introduced via the backdoor in Brussels in a way that will cause resentment of both the rights and the EU itself."*

EU Budget 2014 - 2020

Most MEPs voted for an increase in the EU budget from 2014 (20 October). Speaking in the budget debate in Strasbourg, François Alfonsi welcomed the fact that funding would be available to support endangered languages, and that efforts to reduce spending in areas such as sustainable development had been thwarted.

Some MEPs, including the SNP, voted for a freeze in the budget, with Alyn Smith arguing that *"at a time*

when budgets in all areas of public life are being squeezed the EU should certainly not be immune."

See François' intervention in the budget debate at www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bymep&pageby=unit&idmep=96750&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=0

Turkey violates rights of the Kurds - Europe turns a blind eye

In an extensive opinion article in leading Flemish newspaper De Standaard (20 October), Frieda Brepoels (N-VA) argued that Turkey is failing to observe European values. Brepoels argued that the Turkish regime is failing to respect the human rights of its Kurdish minority who largely boycotted a recent referendum on constitutional reform aiming for more democratisation in the country. The N-VA MEP has said that Turkey's failure to respect minority rights is in breach of European values, and that Europe fails to take a stronger stance against the country. Brepoels also pointed out that hundreds of Kurdish activists are being pursued by the Turkish regime, at a time when EU membership negotiations are ongoing. You can read the full article at www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=KU30URUD

European External Action Service

The European Parliament gave the green light for the European External Action Service (EEAS) to fully get to work by approving the amendments needed to the EU budget (20 October). The move was welcomed by N-VA MEP Frieda Brepoels who said that the new service would play an important role in the world. Brepoels - a member of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee - commented: *"We're now going to see a more unified European influence on a global level, and I think that will lead to more efficient working and better results."* The European diplomatic service, in its start-up phase in 2010, begins work with a budget of nine million euros and more than 1600 staff. For more information see www.eeas.europa.eu

Moldova - progress on reforms

EFA MEP Tatjana Zdanoka spoke in the debate on developments in Moldova (21 October) - which wants eventually to join the EU. Zdanoka - Vice Chair of the Delegation for Relations with Moldova - said that Moldova should not see EU membership as an end in itself. The Latvian MEP also emphasised the need to step up economic and judicial reforms, particularly in the fight against corruption.

See Tatjana speak in the debate at 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=0

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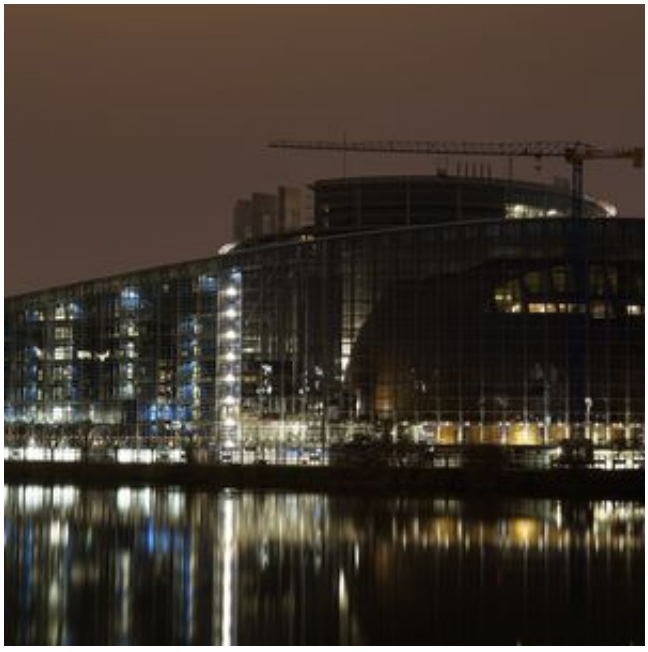

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Responsible MEPs



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Member



Ian Hudghton

Member



Heather Anderson

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