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e-fa News Round-Up September 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

In September 2010, EFA MEPs have been in Strasbourg and Brussels for committee meetings and plenary sessions of the European Parliament as well as in their constituencies.

Important issues for EFA MEPs this month have included:

- GMO free regions
- Plaid Cymru conference
- Basque peace process
- Special status for island and mountain regions
- Democratic reform in Turkey
- Reform of the financial markets
- EU Regional Funding
- Mapuche political prisoners

I Culori d'Umani

Corsican MEP François Alfonsi opened the *'I Culori d'Umani'* exhibition at the European Parliament in Strasbourg in the presence of Jean-François Bernardini, President of the Association for a Corsican Foundation. MEPs and spectators were treated to a traditional Corsican choral recital or 'paghjella' and an exhibition of local art. François Alfonsi called for more to be done to protect the Corsican language and cultural traditions.

See more at http://greens-efa-service.org/medialib/mcinfo/pub/en/scc/1692

Plaid Cymru conference

N-VA MEP Frieda Brepoels was a guest speaker at the Plaid Cymru annual conference in Aberystwyth where she told delegates about her party's recent successes. The conference also saw Jill Evans give her first address as party President.

GMO-free regions

Plaid MEP Jill Evans chaired the morning session of the GMO free regions conference at the European Parliament in Brussels. Over 250 delegates from 37 countries took part where they heard contributions from Europe's Environment Commissioner John Dalli amongst others.

Jill called for the ban on new GMO approvals to remain in place, saying: *"The ban on new GMO approvals should remain until proper risk assessments are carried out to ensure GMOs pose no danger to human health and the environment."*

See more of the conference at http://greens-efa-service.org/medialib/mcinfo/pub/en/scc/1713

Basque Peace Process

Several EFA MEPs have been very active in working to promote EU support for the peace process in the Basque Country. They called for the EU to offer its full support to the peace process in the Basque Country following ETA's recent announcement. EFA MEPs were instrumental in setting up the Basque Friendship Group in the European Parliament several years ago in order to bring EU backing for a peaceful resolution of the decades old conflict.

Speaking in the European Parliament, Corsican MEP François Alfonsi said: *"The news emerging from the Basque Country is very encouraging. ETA have taken a public step towards a political and peaceful resolution of the conflict. Their statement speaks of an end to the military conflict, something that goes further than the ceasefire reported in the media. We need to see an international framework put in place to take this process forward, and the European Union must play its full part."*

Flemish MEP Frieda Brepoels (N-VA) added: *"The EU played an important role in the Northern Ireland peace process. I am sure that the time is right for the EU to play an even more important role in helping bring*

permanent peace to the Basque Country. Europe cannot afford to let this opportunity slip away."

Catalan MEP Oriol Junqueras, also a member of the Friendship Group, added: *"ETA's announcement is a significant step forward towards peace and political normalisation. Now it's time for the Spanish Government as well as the Spanish parties to show a generous attitude that makes it easier for ETA to declare a unilateral and definitive end to violence without preconditions. This is the intelligent way to work for peace."*

Special status for island and mountain regions

SNP MEP Alyn Smith called for the EU to create a specific European Status for Islands, Mountainous and Sparsely populated areas. MEPs discussed the matter with the European Commission at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Alyn is also the Vice President of a cross party group on islands, mountainous and sparsely populated areas, and has been pushing for special status for such areas for years.

The special status will allow for special consideration to be given in future funding, but also in transport, agriculture and fisheries policies, which are often designed with rules that do not quite fit.

Alyn said: *"Special status would see more sensitive rules on state aid, transport, agriculture and fisheries, but on every other aspect of EU policy too, allowing a more flexible approach where there are territorial issues to take into account. This can only be good news for Scotland, and would see the Scottish government operating with a lot more leeway in interpreting EU rules which too often are one size fits all, despite our best efforts."*

See Alyn's intervention in the debate at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bygp&pageby=unit&idmep=28508&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=0

Democratic reform in Turkey

Earlier in September a referendum took place in Turkey on constitutional reform. This is part of Ankara's aim of placing Turkey on a more European path, but N-VA and EFA MEP Frieda Brepoels described the referendum as a missed opportunity.

Brepoels said: *"The constitutional reform does little for diversity in the country. The referendum brings a solution for the Kurdish question no closer. Only through recognition of the rights of Kurdish people can Turkey properly move towards fundamental democratisation."*

For these reasons many Kurdish leaders recommended a boycott of the referendum, feeling that the constitutional reform offered little by way of solutions to problems which the Kurdish minority have faced for many years. Countless court cases, thousands of Kurdish children imprisoned and a ban on education in their own language. Brepoels believes that the result of the referendum should be taken with a pinch of salt given the call for a Kurdish boycott which was massively supported.

EU Regional Funding

Welsh MEP Jill Evans called on EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy and the European Commission to ensure that countries such as Wales continue to receive vital EU funds in future. There are fears that EU structural funding for Wales and elsewhere could be under threat if plans go ahead to hand back control over regional funding to Member State Governments.

Jill is working with other MEPs and the One Wales Government to protect vital EU funding for Wales. European Commission President José Manuel Barroso is due to visit Wales next week. Jill will meet the Commission President after his meeting with Ministers at the Senedd where he will see evidence of how important European funding is for Welsh communities.

Speaking in the European Parliament, Jill said: *"Three quarters of my constituency currently receives structural funding to combat some of the highest poverty levels in Europe. To continue this progress in this and many other regions, regional funding must not be nationalised to the member states. I urge the Council and the Commission not to jeopardise this EU assistance for long term sustainable development."*

See Jill's intervention in the debate at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/wps-europarl-internet/frd/vod/player?language=en&menusearchfrom=bymep&pageby=unit&idmep=4550&discussionId=0&page=0&category=0&format=wmv?date=&askedDiscussionNumber=0

Reform of the financial markets

Also this month, MEPs approved a number of financial measures designed to better co-ordinate and better regulate financial markets across the EU. The Parliament voted on a number of reports which will create new EU financial supervisory authorities (for Banking, Insurance, Pensions, Securities and Markets) and a European Systemic Risk Board to monitor ongoing risks and act as a counterweight to the commercial ratings agencies, who were so instrumental in the financial crisis.

SNP MEP Alyn Smith welcomed the move. Smith said: *"The financial crisis showed up a number of flaws in how the EU financial markets do business, and we need to learn the lessons. The Single European Market is the EU's biggest achievement. It has created much prosperity across our 27 states and it is imperative that we regulate that market properly. We needed to update the supervisory architecture and this package takes us a good few steps forward."*

Mapuche political prisoners

EFA MEPs expressed their serious concerns for the situation of more than thirty political prisoners from the Mapuche indigenous people in Chile who have been on hunger strike since 12 July. Euro-MPs including Catalan Oriol Junqueras, met María Muñiz, President of the European Parliament delegation to the EU - Chile Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to raise their concerns.

The hunger strikers are angry at the repeated breaches of their human rights and that of their people as a result of Pinochet-era anti-terror law, as well as the military occupation of parts of Mapuche ancestral areas where territorial rights have often been usurped by multinational companies.

The MEPs have called for the issue to be discussed at the next meeting of the European Parliament's Chile Delegation which will take place on 30 September in the presence of Chile's Ambassador to the EU.

Commenting, Esquerra MEP Oriol Junqeras said: *"This group of Mapuche protestors have been on hunger strike since July. They are angry with the Chilean authorities for prosecuting them under the Pinochet-era anti-terror laws for their part in protests to defend the rights of Mapuche people. There are also much wider concerns about the treatment of Mapuche indigenous people in Chile."*

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Press release

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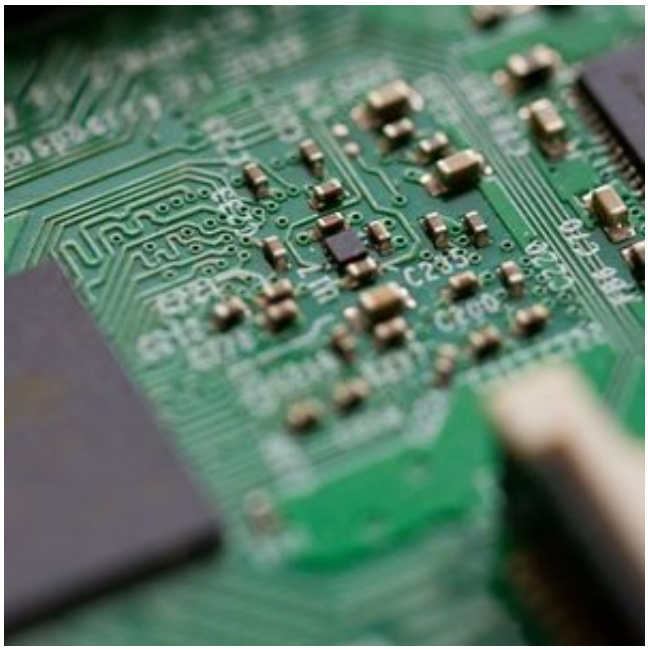


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