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e-fa: News Round-Up

news bulletin from the European Free Alliance Group in the European Parliament

April 2013 Round-Up

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 (EFA Group Vice-President)

Mark Demesmaeker MEP - Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie

François Alfonsi MEP - U Partitu di a Nazione Corsa - Europe Ecologie

Ana Miranda MEP - Bloque Nacionalista Galego

Alyn Smith MEP - Scottish National Party

Tatjana Zdanoka MEP - For Human Rights in a United Latvia



Highlights this month include:

- **Alfonsi report on language diversity**
- **Facebook T&C's criticised**
- **Schulz questioned on Latvia intervention**
- **Calls for mackerel mediation**
- **Turkey's progress to EU membership**
- **Ocean energy event in Brussels**
- **Support for new youth employment measures**
- **Kosovo's self-determination**

Alfonsi report on language diversity

EFA MEP **François Alfonsi** from Corsica has called for a joint effort between the European Commission and Europe's nations and regions to protect Europe's endangered languages and promote language diversity.

François spoke as he presented a draft of his report on Europe's endangered languages and linguistic diversity to the European Parliament's Culture Committee in Brussels.

François Alfonsi is the European Parliament's only Corsican-speaking MEP and this is the European Parliament's first detailed study of the issue of language diversity and protecting endangered languages in Europe in a number of years. There has been no major, in-depth international study into endangered languages since the 1990s.

The report regrets the drastic cuts to EU funding available for promoting language diversity over the past decade. It calls on the EU and its Member States to 'commit wholeheartedly to a policy of protection and promotion that is up to the job of preserving the diversity of the EU's linguistic and cultural heritage by supporting ambitious protection policies within the language communities concerned.'

It also calls on the EU to support a language policy that 'enables children to acquire two mother tongues from the very earliest age.'

François Alfonsi said: *"I was very encouraged by the positive comments of many of colleagues about the need to protect Europe's linguistic heritage. Linguistic diversity is a part of our shared cultural heritage and all languages are a part of our shared cultural future. The speakers of Europe's endangered languages need and deserve our support.*

"Let's remember that linguistic diversity receives specific mention in the EU's Lisbon Treaty, and as such, it should be respected as a core value of the EU.

"What we need is a joint effort between the European Commission, and Europe's nations and regions to protect and promote Europe's rich linguistic heritage. I regret that funding made available for this work at EU level has been cut dramatically since 2000. But there are positive signs, with some European countries making successful efforts to help endangered languages. Let's learn from that success and work together so that future generations can enjoy Europe's rich linguistic heritage."

Alfonsi was also critical of the failure of France's President Hollande to fulfil an election pledge to ratify Europe's Minority Language Charter.

Facebook T&C's criticised

A reply from the European Commission to a question submitted by Flemish EFA MEP **Mark Demesmaeker** shows that a lot of terms and conditions Facebook imposes on its European users are not valid in the European Union.

Mark said: *"Even more so, some of the conditions are outright unfair. That even American giants like Facebook are bound by European consumer rights proves the use of the EU."*

At the registration of a new Facebook account one has to agree with the "statement of rights and responsibilities" which contains terms and conditions with legally binding commitments for the user. According to these terms and conditions, claims brought against the company fall under Californian Law. Thereby Facebook requires the consumer to grant exclusive jurisdiction to the court in Santa Clara County, near the company's headquarters in the United States.

European Commissioner Viviane Reding, responsible for consumer rights, now claims this is not in accordance with European Law. According to the Brussels I and Rome I regulations a European Facebook user has to have the option of settling a claim in the court of their place of residence. Even courts in other EU Member states can declare themselves competent "notwithstanding the choice of court agreement in favour of the US courts, the Member State's court could take jurisdiction on the basis of Regulation." Other conditions, including the limitation of liability up to 100 dollars "may also be assessed as unfair and as such, not binding." According to the Commission this includes all other Facebook terms and conditions in the statement which cause a significant imbalance in rights and responsibilities between the parties detrimental for the consumer.

"Facebook is a wonderful social medium which I gladly use. But it shows a great lack of respect for European regulations, which protect consumer rights in case of disagreement, to just set them aside. I call upon Facebook, in the interests of their European users, to change their policy as soon as possible," said Demesmaeker.

Schulz questioned on Latvia intervention

Latvian MEP **Tatjana Ždanoka** has asked European Parliament President Martin Schulz to explain his recent intervention in Latvian domestic politics.

Mr Schulz, a social democrat, gave an interview published in the Latvian media recently in which he expressed his admiration of the firmness shown by Latvian people in the face of the austerity measures of the Latvian government and described the Latvian economy as growing.

Latvia was one of the first European countries to implement deep austerity measures. Public sector salaries

have declined and pensions and other social benefits for the less well off have been cut. The right wing government of Latvia likes to use the phrase "success story" characterising the figures of growing national budget or the rising profit of big companies in the Latvian market. But Latvian people have not felt an end to the crisis and they continue to vote against the "success story" of their government by leaving the country.

Ms Ždanoka raised the issue in the European Parliament chamber this month.

Speaking in Parliament, Tatjana Ždanoka said: *"I would like to pose some questions to the President of our Parliament, who is still a member of his Socialist group, regarding his 3rd of April interview to the biggest Latvian website "Delfi". In that interview Mr Schulz expressed his admiration for the perseverance of Latvians and described our economy as steadily growing. These are not only my questions since a lot of ordinary Latvians after reading the interview were surprised with such a position taken by a former president of the S&D group.*

"These questions are as follows. Whether Mr Schulz believes that the drastic austerity measures have led to stable economic growth? And even if that is so, whether the social price of these measures is not too high?

"The Latvian economy isn't growing. It is in decline. In January of this year, it was revealed that industrial output compared with December had declined by 3.5%. The social price people pay and will pay for the austerity measures hitting the most vulnerable in Latvian society can only be described as a catastrophe. In "a world rating of happiness", prepared for the UN on quality of life, Latvia was in 106th place – 8 places lower than Iraq, 105 places below Denmark. I call upon our socialist and democrat colleagues in this house to support people's struggle for social justice rather than supporting neoliberal dictatorship."

Calls for mackerel mediation

SNP President and MEP **Ian Hudghton** intervened in April in the dispute between the EU and Iceland over mackerel fishing quotas in the North Atlantic.

Since 2010, Iceland has unilaterally imposed quotas for mackerel fishing, which had traditionally been agreed jointly with the EU, Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands. This has seen Iceland award itself a substantially higher allocation of mackerel stocks which are economically very important for Scotland's fishing industry.

The European Parliament's Fisheries Committee asked Europe's Fisheries Commissioner, Maria Damanaki, to appear before the European Parliament to answer questions on the matter. Ms Damanaki was challenged about the European Commission's failure to implement trade sanctions against Iceland, as recommended by the European Parliament. Ian Hudghton intervened in the debate and proposed appointing an international mediator, as previously suggested by the Scottish Fisheries Minister.

Speaking in the debate, Ian said: *"It is frustrating that we are still in an impasse on mackerel. Mackerel is economically a very valuable stock to Scotland. It is frustrating that European regulation is all-powerful when it comes to restricting the activities of our own fishermen, and yet the Commission seems powerless to help us in this mackerel dispute.*

"The Fisheries Minister of Scotland has suggested that an international mediator be appointed to help broker an agreement, ending the dispute in an objective and neutral way. I hope that the Commission will pursue that constructive suggestion with a view to getting all parties back around the negotiating table."

The Commissioner accepted that this was a very important issue with serious consequences. She shared our concerns but was required to carefully consider legal and other issues before proceeding to sanctions

with regard to mackerel.

She did however say that the situation with herring presented more legal clarity and that the Commission would very soon be moving forward with trade sanctions against the Faroe Islands with regard to Atlanto-Scandian herring.

Turkey's progress to EU membership

N-VA MEP **Mark Demesmaeker** raised concerns about Turkey's progress towards EU membership when the issue came up at the European Parliament in Strasbourg in April.

Earlier, Demesmaeker and other MEPs met Kurdish politician Ahmet Turk, who had come to Strasbourg to plead for progress in negotiating a peaceful end to the conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish autonomists. Turkey's Kurds make up about 20 per cent of the population and have suffered political and linguistic repression over the years.

Speaking in the debate, Demesmaeker said: *"It's clear that the solution to many of the difficult issues that dominate the EU's relationship with Turkey lies in Turkish hands. So too does the solution of the Kurdish question.*

"We must not be blind to the dangers of Ankara unilaterally setting the conditions for peace negotiations with the Kurds. The tentative steps taken thus far towards peace are of course to be welcomed, but we must be wary of this being exploited as a good news story for the Erdogan government. Time will tell if the regime is sincere, and certainly the ongoing existence of Turkey as the world's biggest prison for journalists gives serious cause for concern.

"We need to see ongoing, sustainable political dialogue between Turkey and the Kurds. The EU should take full advantage of the momentum that now exists to push for full recognition of the Kurds' basic rights. That means full linguistic and cultural rights, political autonomy, and a recognition of their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly."

Alyn hosts major ocean energy event in Brussels

SNP MEP **Alyn Smith** welcomed a number of key players from the ocean energy sector to the European Parliament in April.

Alyn hosted an event at the European Parliament to launch the European Ocean Energy Association's Vision Paper for the sector and kick-off their new campaign for ocean energy support. The event was attended by a number of international companies and trade associations, including RenewableUK, along with influential Members of the European Parliament's powerful Energy Committee and European Commission staff.

The Vision Paper reflects the strategic priorities of the European Ocean Energy Association's members for commercialising the Ocean Energy sector. It sets out an action plan for all stakeholders to work together to build a thriving European ocean energy sector which maximises the energy security benefits and job creation in EU Member States in the process.

Speaking in Brussels after the event, Alyn said: *"The European Ocean Energy Association has been working extremely hard for the sector and I'm delighted to be able to play a small part in helping them today.*

"Ocean energy offers a massive opportunity for us. I was amazed to find out that 0.1% of the energy in ocean waves could be capable of supplying the entire world's energy requirements five times over. As a clean

source of renewable energy, our oceans have a huge role to play in contributing to Europe's renewable energy mix. This is a growing industry with massive potential but we must work together towards a common agenda in order to see the ocean energy sector thrive and become a mainstream renewable energy supplier in the future. That is exactly what the Vision Paper sets out to do and I look forward to working with the sector to make this a reality.

"Scotland is well-known in Europe for its advances in renewable energy, especially ocean energy where we are leading the way. Our conditions make Scotland the ideal location for investment in ocean energy and, as a result, we have more wave and tidal energy devices being developed and tested than anywhere else in the world. It makes sense for Scotland to be at the heart of ocean energy development and I will be doing all I can to help the sector reach that crucial market-ready stage."

Support for new Youth Employment measures

Plaid MEP for Wales **Jill Evans** says the EU has taken a step closer to a new £5 billion scheme to tackle the high levels of youth unemployment. The Employment and Social Affairs Committee voted in April on the scheme which now has to be agreed with all the EU governments. Jill Evans is calling on the Welsh Government to ensure Wales qualifies for the funding.

The youth unemployment rate in Wales is a shocking 23 per cent, creating a 'lost generation'. In December, Plaid Cymru secured a deal with the Welsh government to provide £40m over two years to fund apprenticeships.

Jill Evans said: *"We have fought hard to put youth unemployment at the top of the political agenda. This proposal for a Youth Guarantee Scheme was first put forward by my group in Parliament.*

"It is unacceptable that nearly a quarter of young people in Wales are unemployed. We cannot afford another lost generation. Tackling this must be a top priority which is why I welcome the Youth Guarantee Scheme. It means that all young people are entitled to receive a good-quality offer of employment, education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. It does not just concentrate on employment but also offers opportunities for young people before they drop out of education. It applies to all young people, regardless of their levels of education, whether graduates or those with no qualifications.

"Crisis countries with high youth unemployment are the main priority and if the committee's proposal that all regions with youth unemployment rates over 20% are eligible for the funding then West Wales and the Valleys will certainly qualify. The Youth Guarantee Scheme will apply to the whole country and can in any case be funded through the Social Fund. I am calling on the Welsh Government to ensure that the UK minister supports the 20% threshold rather than the higher figure put forward by the Commission so that the maximum number of young people can be helped into employment, education or training."

Kosovo's self-determination

Galician MEP **Ana Miranda** took part in the European Parliament's debate on Kosovo's progress towards EU integration.

Ana welcomed the recognition of Kosovo's right to choose its own future, but regretted that certain existing EU member states seemed to be less keen to follow this principle.

Speaking in the debate, Ana said: *"We European nations defend the international right to self-determination – in the European context as well. We support the international community's right to decide and obligation of recognition. We are democrats, and we support the right of Kosovo to be an independent state recognised by*

most of the states in the international community.

"Today there are only five Member States in the European Union which have not recognised this reality. One of these Member States is the Spanish State. Why does Spain not recognise Kosovo? Perhaps the party in power is against democracy? Why can Catalan people not vote to decide on their own future in a referendum as the Scottish people can? The European Union has to recognise these new future states in Europe. The economic crisis shows that we need more Europe and more forces to find the solutions together. Kosovo can become a new Member State of the European Union. Peoples can decide their future if we accept the right to self-determination."

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Press release

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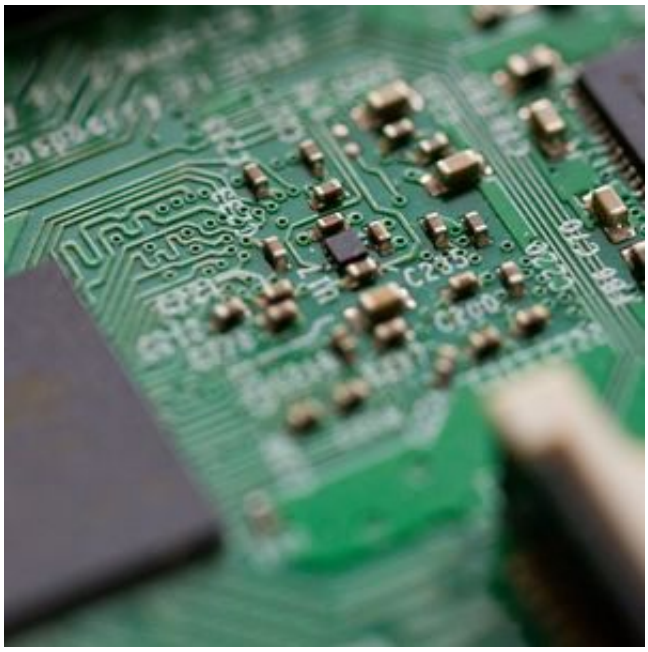


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