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e-fa Strasbourg Round-Up December 2009

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 - 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 December

EFA MEPs have been in Strasbourg this week for a plenary session of the European Parliament. Subjects on the agenda included the Middle East Peace Process, the Copenhagen Summit and the Swedish EU Presidency.

EFA MEPs in Copenhagen

Plaid MEP Jill Evans and the SNP's Alyn Smith travelled to Copenhagen to push for a firm agreement at the UN Climate Change Summit and urge the EU to stick to stringent targets. Both expressed regret that Scottish and Welsh ministers had not been invited to join the UK Government delegation despite Scotland and Wales having developed radical and far reaching policies to tackle climate change.

Jill commented *"All of us are pinning our hopes on world leaders taking responsibility for fighting climate catastrophe and reaching an agreement in the next two days. The European Union must provide more leadership and improve its targets to encourage others to do the same - not abandon the 30% reduction target as is feared now."*

Call for EU clarity on Mid East peace process

The N-VA's Frieda Brepoels called for the EU to take a clear and unequivocal position on the future of East Jerusalem during a debate with the Council and Commission on the current situation in the Middle East and East Jerusalem. This followed a Council statement of 8 December calling for further negotiations and for a way to be found to make Jerusalem the capital of both Israel and a future Palestinian state.

Frieda said: *"The EU's delegation leaders in Jerusalem and Ramallah made very clear that Israel is actively engaged in the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem and in the process of isolating it from the rest of the West Bank. Why then does the Foreign Affairs Council not draw firm conclusions from this? Why not confirm such an important factual report knowing that such an illegal development becomes irreversible, casting doubt on the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state side by side with Israel? The Middle East peace process has no need for woolly messages. It is high time and the right moment for the EU to take an active and visible role in the region. But this can only happen if we are ready to take a clear and unequivocal position on this issue."*

Alfonsi intervenes on EU Cohesion Policy

François Alfonsi spoke in the debate on the future of EU regional policy after 2013. MEPs are concerned about some unofficial budget reform proposals which could lead to severe cuts in regional funding. François argued against plans to transfer powers over regional development to the member states, fearing that this would be very disadvantageous for Europe's regions. Speaking in the debate he also said *"For us, cohesion policy is at the heart of one of the most important principles of the European Union: solidarity. Europe is stronger every time European solidarity is expressed."*

Catalan referendums

EFA MEPs reported back from their visit to observe the highly successful Catalan independence referendums. François Alfonsi, Frieda Brepoels and Jill Evans were in Catalonia at the invitation of Oriol Junqueras. A grassroots initiative used existing powers to organise a series of local referendums at town and municipal level in order to give people a say on Catalonia's constitutional future. On a turnout of around 30%, over 94% of participants voted in favour of independence for Catalonia and Esquerra will now call for a binding referendum to be held.

François Alfonsi said: *"These referendums are important not only for Catalonia but for other nations and regions who want the right to be consulted about their constitutional future. Of course the political and constitutional circumstances vary from place to place, but the power of popular democracy cannot be*

diminished."

EU should get ready for Scottish independence

Ian Hudghton called for the EU institutions to begin preparing for Scottish independence. He was speaking in a debate in parliament with Swedish Prime Minister Frederik Reinfeldt. Sweden currently holds the six month rotating EU Presidency which has focussed on issues including climate change, the economy and employment.

Ian lambasted the UK Government for failing to allow a Scottish minister to take part in the official UK ministerial delegation at the Copenhagen climate change conference, even though Scotland has the world's most ambitious climate change legislation. Ian also argued for the EU to begin preparing for 'internal enlargement', a term used to describe to the process where countries that are part of existing member states achieve their independence.

Ian said: *"I represent the European Free Alliance part of our Group which includes the Independence Parties of Wales, Flanders, Catalunya and Scotland. We seek Independent status so that our nations can contribute to European Council meetings and to world events such as the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change. The Government and Parliament of Scotland have adopted the world's most ambitious Climate Change Act - with emission reduction targets of 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. These are targets we intend to achieve, yet the UK Government refused a reasonable request for a Scottish Minister to take part in the formal proceedings at Copenhagen.*

"Such behaviour underlines the fact that it is only with normal Independent Nation status that Scotland can properly contribute to the international community. I hope that the European Council will soon be discussing practical arrangements for the internal enlargement of the European Union, with Scotland leading the way."

Economic crisis in Latvia

Austerity measures taken by certain European states in response to the global financial downturn should not be allowed to increase poverty levels said Tatjana Zdanoka during a debate in Parliament on the EU's role in helping central and eastern European member states deal with the financial crisis.

Tatjana strongly criticised the Latvian government's response to the crisis which has seen pensions and benefits cut for the most vulnerable in order for the country to qualify for EU and IMF handouts. Zdanoka has also launched a written declaration in the European Parliament which reminds the European Commission and EU Member States of their responsibilities to protect people's social rights when combating the economic crisis and campaigners from Latvia handed out leaflets to MEPs urging them to sign the declaration.

Tatjana said: *"I come from Latvia - a country hit severely by the financial crisis. Due to the irresponsible policy of right-wing governments Latvia risked going bankrupt had there not been outside financial assistance. The EU institutions are perceived as "the bad guys" by many residents of Latvia. The bad guys who make our poor government cut pensions and benefits. The bad guys to blame for social exclusion and poverty. Do I believe that Latvia and other countries of the region urgently need the EU's helping hand? Yes, I do. But I strongly believe that we need a strong mechanism for control. And we need very strong conditions in*

the field of social policy. EU money should, first of all, save common people, not banks or state bureaucracy."

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Responsible MEPs



Jill Evans

Member



Ian Hudghton

Member



Heather Anderson

Member

Contact person



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