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e-fa Strasbourg Round-Up October 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-Vlaams 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: 19 - 22 October

The European Parliament has been meeting in Strasbourg this week. Issues on the agenda have included the 2010 budget, freedom of information, milk prices, data protection issues related to the Schengen area and preparations for the forthcoming European Council summit which will be held in Brussels on 29-30 October.

EFA in Corsica

At this week's parliamentary group meeting EFA Group President Jill Evans thanked Corsican MEP François Alfonsi for the warm welcome the group received during the visit to Corsica last week. A successful conference was held at the Palais des Congres in Ajaccio on Thursday which focussed on sustainable tourism and cross border transport - two hugely important subjects for Corsica and for EFA as

a whole.

The conference was addressed by speakers including Michel Biggi, from the Corsican Tourism Agency, François Desrentes, Director of Sustainable Development at the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions and Jean Didier Hache, Executive Secretary for Islands at the CPMR. EFA MEPs Frieda Brepoels and Oriol Junqueras also intervened in the debate.

On Friday, EFA MEPs got to see sustainable tourism in action during a visit to the isolated village of Girolata (where François is also the local mayor), and which is also a UNESCO world heritage site.

Jill meets new Education & Culture Commissioner

On Wednesday in Strasbourg Jill met Slovakia's Maros Sefcovic, the new EU Commissioner for Culture, Education and Training. Mr Sefcovic has replaced Jan Figel who resigned in order to take up the leadership of the Conservative Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia. Mr Sefcovic took office on 1 October.

Jill reminded the new Commissioner of the EFA Group's priorities in terms of promoting multilingualism. She emphasised the need to make progress on improving the status at EU level for Welsh, Catalan, Galician and other languages which are official in their own territories but are not yet full official EU languages. The EFA Group is pushing for interpretation to be made available so that these languages can be used in the European Parliament.

Social rights must be protected during economic crisis

Tatjana Zdanoka is campaigning to remind the European Commission and EU Member States of their responsibilities to protect people's social rights when combating the economic crisis. Tatjana this week launched a written declaration in the European Parliament which has already gained support from MEPs from the Greens/EFA, Socialist and Liberal Groups.

The declaration reminds the Commission and the Member States of their obligations under the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the European Social Charter. Since more European citizens are at risk of poverty due to the crisis, it calls for adequate protection for social rights to be maintained - such as pensions and social security benefits and public sector salaries. Latvia has been particularly badly hit by the financial crisis, with the government adopting deep cuts in public spending on social protection in order to satisfy conditions for an EU backed financial stimulus package. This has led to 10% cuts in pensions, 70% cuts in pensions for working pensioners, 50% cuts in parental allowances for working parents, and cuts in the non-taxable minimum income.

Tatjana explained: *"An increasing number of European citizens are at risk of poverty due to the financial crisis. We would argue that deep cuts in government spending on social protection are unacceptable - and will only have the effect of further impoverishing people. We are already seeing this happen in Latvia. The Commission and the Member States must be aware of their obligations to protect their citizens from poverty and provide adequate social protection. Making the poorest people in society even poorer does not help us overcome the economic crisis and the European Commission must urgently wake up to this fact."*

Junqueras calls on EU Commission to promote people's right to broadband access

Catalan MEP Oriol Junqueras urged both the European Commission and the Council to promote the right of EU citizens to have broadband internet connection. Speaking in Italian during the plenary in Strasbourg, Oriol said: *"This service is an important element of economic growth, of social justice and regional balance because it guarantees access to information and avoids the creation of a digital divide."*

Oriol emphasised that the right in Europe to broadband access is absolutely essential in order to construct a European knowledge economy, as defined in the Lisbon objectives. He also highlighted that Finland's Ministry of Transport and Communication had pledged that Finnish people would enjoy the right to broadband access, as a universal service, from July 2010 onwards. To begin with, this broadband provision will include traffic of 1Mb per second, increasing by the end of 2015 to 100Mb per second.

Junqueras asked the European Commission to take action in order to adopt the Finnish model and to make sure that Europe develops into a world leader in economic modernisation and equality of opportunity.

Alyn joins financial crisis inquiry

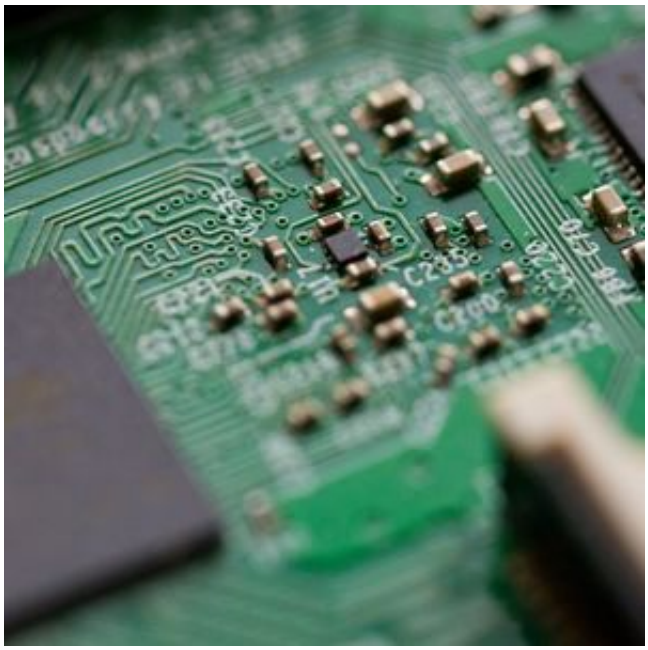
SNP MEP Alyn Smith was confirmed this week as the sole Scots and the only EFA MEP on a committee of inquiry established by the European Parliament to look into the causes of the global financial crisis and come up with proposals to avoid a repeat.

The committee will provisionally exist for a year, and has a remit to explore the reasons behind the financial crisis, and recommend what measures should be implemented, and where, to remedy any regulatory failings it finds. The first phase of the inquiry will be to organise public hearings with financiers and Ministers before the Committee to give evidence, followed by a drafting phase, coming up with what ideas for what reformed regulation is found to be necessary.

Alyn said: *"There are so many lessons to be learned from the financial disaster that befell the Scottish, European and world economies, and this Committee will be at the heart of that work in Europe. I'm keen to find out how other countries fared and why. While no country in the world was unaffected by the crisis, some were notably worse hit than others. The experience across the EU has been remarkably different, with Scandinavia in particular, Iceland excepted, proving an area of considerable relative stability."*

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Responsible MEPs



Jill Evans

Member



Ian Hudghton

Member



Heather Anderson

Member

Contact person



Steven Cornelius

EFA Press, Communications & Campaigns Officer

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