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EFA MEP publishes open letter on TTIP

Detailed response from SNP President Ian Hudghton MEP

In response to unprecedented interest and lobbying about TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), SNP MEP Ian Hudghton has published the following open letter detailing his own and his party's position on the issue following recent developments in the European Parliament.



Dear Constituent,

Thank you for your interest in the progress of negotiation and debate on TTIP, and in particular the recent vote which we had in the European Parliament on a report drafted by our International Trade (INTA) Committee. The report had been agreed upon some months ago in Committee, controversially, by a "grand coalition" between the Socialist Group, including Labour MEPs, and the EPP Group, the largest right-wing grouping.

INTA Committee MEPs from my political grouping, the Greens/European Free Alliance, voted against the compromise resolution at Committee stage following the rejection of a range of amendments which had been tabled. All reports from Committees of the EP have to be considered and voted upon by all MEPs at a plenary session. The progress of this particular report towards a plenary vote has been unusually difficult, and the tactics employed by the above-mentioned "grand coalition" have led to even greater controversy.

The day before we were due to vote at a plenary session in early June, the Parliament's President, Martin Schultz, enforced an underhand use of the rules of procedure, unilaterally deciding to postpone the vote and ordering that the report must go back to Committee stage. Mr Schultz took that view, he claimed, because there were too many amendments tabled by MEPs! This meant that a plenary debate on the report

would have been pointless without the opportunity to state our position in a vote. With no opportunity for MEPs to vote on the substance of TTIP, all that we did have in June was an unseemly procedural wrangle resulting from the unreasonable decision of the President of Parliament to deny us the much anticipated opportunity to vote.

The real reason for postponing the vote was that rapporteur Bernd Lange had failed to gain majority support within his own Group for his Committee compromise on ISDS and as a result the Social and Democrat group, which includes the Labour Party MEPs, faced a huge split amongst its members on the matter.

Had the vote gone ahead as scheduled in June, I would have supported radical amendment of the report to ensure that our public services, food, health, environmental and labour standards in Scotland were protected. I would also have rejected any shape or form of inclusion of ISDS and sought a clear exemption for Scotland's NHS.

The position of SNP MEPs was set out by our party members at our conference in Glasgow last March. As an SNP MEP, I remain very much pro-democracy, not anti-trade. For Scotland, the USA is our largest trading partner outside the EU. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Commission and Council will listen to the serious concerns surrounding TTIP, all of which have been made crystal clear in the recent rounds of political wrangling in Strasbourg and Brussels.

Following the actions of President Schultz, the INTA Committee convened a meeting to deal with the report and amendments which had been referred back to it. With the full support of MEPs from my political grouping, a vote at Committee resulted in the original report, plus all of the amendments originally tabled at the June plenary session, being sent back to the next available plenary agenda for a full debate and vote.

Consequently, the first opportunity which SNP MEPs have had to vote on TTIP finally arose at the Strasbourg plenary session on 8th July. Our Greens/EFA Group, among others, had tabled a range of amendments designed to radically amend the Committee report. Some examples, from the list of over 100 separate votes, are worth emphasising for your information.

- *SNP MEPs supported three amendments, including one tabled by our political group, calling for a halt to negotiations on TTIP, which were all heavily defeated by a 300-400 vote margin thanks to Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems voting against.*

- *SNP MEPs supported two amendments (AMs 35 and 36), calling for an explicit opt-out for the NHS from TTIP, which were defeated thanks to the Lib Dems abstaining.*

- *SNP MEPs supported AM 20, seeking to ensure social and labour standards were protected in TTIP and not undermined in order to promote trade and investment. This was defeated by a 285-383 vote margin thanks to the Tories and Lib Dems voting against alongside Scottish Labour MEP David Martin.*

- *SNP MEPs supported AM 81, which made it clear that TTIP should not be considered a "living agreement" where important policy decisions can be taken by technical committees after an agreement is signed, meaning that all policy decisions related to US-EU trade should be in the treaty and subject to democratic vote by parliaments. It was defeated 196-500 and was opposed by Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dem.*

- *SNP MEPs supported AM 79, which called for everything related to agriculture and food to be exempt from the negotiations, and also AM 95, which made it clear that, on food safety standards,*

when there are differences between US and EU standards convergence should always be to the higher of the two standards. These were defeated by a 182-514 and 139-529 vote margin respectively as a result of Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems voting against.

- *SNP MEPs supported AM 90, which demanded that the provisions of the recently-agreed EU procurement rules should be protected in TTIP negotiations. It was defeated by a 230-449 vote margin thanks to the Tories and Lib Dem voting against alongside Scottish Labour MEP David Martin.*

Most controversially, a late so-called "compromise" amendment (AM 117) brokered by European Parliament President Martin Schulz on ISDS, which seeks to replace ISDS with a new system of resolving disputes between investors and states, in my view just a new form of ISDS, was passed by 447 votes to 229. SNP MEPs voted against. This disreputable tactic by President Schultz, supported by Scottish Labour MEP David Martin and Scottish Conservative MEP Ian Duncan, meant that all other amendments on ISDS were deemed to have fallen.

Eventually, after the lengthy list of amendments had been voted upon, the report was adopted very largely as it had been originally passed in the INTA committee, with very few amendments winning majority support. The whole resolution was carried by 436 votes to 241 with 32 abstentions. The SNP voted against.

Although the above outcome is very disappointing, it remains important to note that this report is an initiative report - ie non-binding. The actual negotiations on TTIP are being conducted by EU and US officials. The EU negotiators are working to a mandate given to them by the member state governments. It is by no means clear when a final agreement may be reached. Indeed it is possible that the negotiations could go on for a year or two, or possible even longer. Eventually, if a TTIP agreement does emerge, and subsequently wins the backing of the EU member state governments, the European Parliament will have a binding vote on whether or not it should be accepted.

I will continue to use every available opportunity to seek to influence the eventual outcome, and I suggest that maximum pressure from now on be directed towards the European Commission and the UK Government since they are very firmly in the TTIP driving seat in the months and years ahead.

Thank you again for bringing your views to my attention.

Ian Hudghton MEP

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Ian Hudghton

Member

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