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European Parliament sued by France over Strasbourg circus

An EFA press release by MEP Alyn Smith (SNP)

SNP Member of the European Parliament **Alyn Smith** has hailed legal action by France against the European Parliament over the ruinous Strasbourg commute, which MEPs voted to slightly curtail last week in a vote over next year's calendar. France has reportedly lodged papers with the European Court of Justice this week claiming the move is illegal, commencing a legal case which will, for the first time, bring the scandalous implications, not least the 200,000,000 euro cost, of the ruinous commute into the open.

MEPs must, by EU law, meet 12 times a year in Strasbourg even though a clear majority are opposed and would rather be based full-time in Brussels. MEPs voted in a secret ballot last week in Strasbourg to merge two of next year's sessions into one week in October, yet retain two sessions. This modest change would save MEPs one commute, but crucially save the 6000 staff, interpreters and tonnes of documents a trek from Brussels to France, saving money, staff time and carbon emissions, as well as cutting down on wear and tear on MEPs, allowing them to be more efficient and effective.

Alyn Smith said:

"To coin a phrase, bring it on! Dare I say it, 'aux armes citoyens!'" The Parliament does good work on behalf of our citizens but our time is organised in a wasteful and inefficient way, despite our best efforts. The European Parliament is unique in that we have no power over where we hold our sessions beyond a cosmetic power to set our own calendar. The moves last week to merge two sessions next year were deliberately testing the limits of that power and France taking us to court shows, in sharp relief, how France will stop at nothing to keep us in Strasbourg regardless of the cost or the fact it makes us look daft in the eyes of our voters.

"This is the start of a long overdue crisis. Study after study has been done into how the upheaval of MEPs, and thousands of staff and tonnes of documents, from Brussels to Strasbourg wastes money, time, effort and emits vast amounts of carbon. A figure regularly claimed when calculating the costs is 200,000,000 euro per year: that is money our citizens expect to see used more effectively. Literally millions of EU citizens have signed online petitions, and they expect action.

"Strasbourg the town is a bonny wee place, I've nothing against it, but for a modern legislature to be based in two places (as well as the secretariat in Luxembourg!) is inefficient, wasteful and quite

indefensible.

"This legal case will make clear what this problem stems from - a decision of the member states in my own city of Edinburgh at the summit in 1992 when John Major's government traded it for the retention of the UK budget rebate. But what was done by the member states can be undone by the member states, and I have called on Scottish European Minister Fiona Hyslop and UK Foreign Secretary William Hague to raise this at the first opportunity."

NOTE TO EDITORS

1: Smith's PR on the vote last week can be found at:

<http://www.alynsmith.eu/index.php?mact=News%2Ccntnt01%2Cdetail%2C0&cntnt01articleid=864&cntnt01origid=63&cntnt01returnid=80>

The European Free Alliance (EFA) Group in the European Parliament includes MEPs from Scotland, Wales, Catalonia, Flanders, Corsica and Latvia, who advance the cause of Europe's stateless nations, regions and disadvantaged minorities. Greens/EFA is an alliance of different parties from different Member States. Press statements on this website do not necessarily bind all parties. The Group respects the rights of minorities within it to take a separate line from the majority.

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Heather Anderson

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Steven Cornelius

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