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Europe's regionalists and nationalists gather in Aland EFA press release

The European Free Alliance (EFA) European political party holds its annual General Assembly in Mariehamn in the Aland Islands this week (Friday 15 April).

EFA, founded in 1981, draws together regionalist and democratic nationalist political parties active across Europe in promoting self-determination for nations and regions, and in working to defend the rights of linguistic and other minorities.

This year's meeting will be held in the plenary chamber of the Lagting (Aland Islands Parliament) at the invitation of local political party Alands Framtid. It will draw together participants from over 30 of Europe's stateless nations, regions and linguistic minorities from countries such as Scotland, Wales, Catalonia, Flanders, Corsica, Latvia, Brittany, Alsace and of course Aland itself.

The meeting will be an opportunity to review a busy year of activity which has seen new and exciting constitutional developments across Europe, in Flanders, Wales, Catalonia and elsewhere.

EFA Political Party President **Eric Defoort** (Flanders) said:

"With peace as a cornerstone principle of EFA it's no coincidence that we are celebrating our 30th anniversary this year in the Aland islands. The islands stand as a symbol for peace with a demilitarised and neutral statute since 1856, confirmed by the League of Nations in 1921.

"In the days before the election for the Finnish national parliament we support the Swedish speaking minority in Finland. Aland is not Finland.

"One of the many decisions in our GA is to accept a new autonomist party ALPE from Val d'Aoste in Italy and the party representing the German minority in Denmark (Schleswig Partei SP)."

EFA Parliamentary Group President **Jill Evans MEP** (Wales) said:

"We're delighted to be holding this annual event in the Aland Islands for the very first time and I want to thank our local party Alands Framtid for their invitation and hard work. Working together at European level is vital in advancing the cause of Europe's nations, regions and minorities given that the EU is responsible for so many decisions that affect us all on a local level.

"This meeting comes at a significant time of constitutional change in Europe with successful referendums in Catalonia and Wales in favour of further constitutional progress. Our member parties have also enjoyed significant success in local and national elections. Europe is moving in our direction and the European Commission needs to wake up to that.

"We will also be visiting the Aland peace institute to learn more about their work to promote peace and their particular focus on autonomy and minorities. We look forward to learning more about the Aland Islands' experience in democracy and devolved government".

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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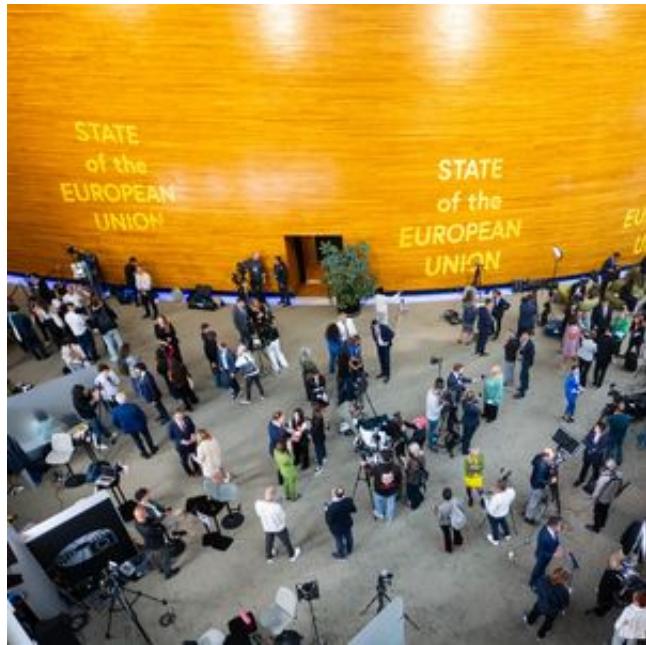
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