

Catherine Stihler MEP

www.cstihlermep.com

Member of the European Parliament for Scotland

EUROPE MATTERS: APRIL 2009

E-NEWSLETTER

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the April edition of my newsletter! Please feel free to pass this to friends, family and colleagues. If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please email me with "unsubscribe" as the subject header.

*Thank you for your support,
Catherine*

EU Set to Be A World Leader in Insurance Regulation

The European Parliament has recently approved a supervisory framework that will enhance the financial stability of the insurance industry in Europe. The groundbreaking legislation was drafted by my Labour colleague Peter Skinner MEP.

The purpose of the new legislation - called Solvency II - introduces a framework for risk management and implements procedures to identify, measure and manage risk levels. New legislation to introduce modern risk-based methods for the security of the insurance and better protection of customers was one of one the first reforms mentioned at the recent G20 Summit.

Solvency II is set to be a world leader. It will put pressure on other countries, particularly the USA, to implement comparable regimes and to enhance the financial stability of their insurance sectors.

Collapse of Working Time Directive Talks

Tuesday 28 April was a black day for Scotland and the rest of the UK. The final agreements on the Working Time Directive have ended without agreement and the UK will retain the opt-out clause. The retention of the opt out means that member states will still allow employers to press employees to individually opt out of a basic piece of health and safety legislation forcing them to work more than 48 hours per week.

The Scottish Nationalist and Conservatives MEPs voted to retain the opt out clause. It is a disgrace that the real implications for Scottish families have been glossed over. Recent studies have indicated that working long hours increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, depression and stress. If the legislation had been agreed it would have been a step forward to ending the long hours working culture so prevalent in the UK.

The Tories and the EU

Conservative MEPs want to take Britain out of the social agreements we have reached at EU level. This would end our rights to maternity and paternity leave, to paid holidays, and to giving agency and temporary workers the same rights as full time employees. The Conservatives also want to stop the common European efforts to tackle climate change and reduce pollution.

Why do the Conservatives and other Eurosceptics take this stance? - simply because they have been agreed at European level and the right wing of the Conservative party has become obsessively anti-European.

Now is not the time to turn back the clocks, but a time for a strong, progressive EU that will champion the rights of its citizens.

EU Climate Change Push

The EU has taken the lead on the global fight against climate change. By agreeing common targets with our neighbours across our continent, we have much more impact - setting high standards for the world's largest market. European leadership in this field also gives us clout in the world level negotiations to find a worthy successor to the Kyoto Treaty.

Alasdair Darling's 2009 Budget is a real boost for the UK's green agenda. Our Chancellor has announced a target of a 34 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Ambitious targets are what we need to ensure that the UK meets important EU targets.

Future of the Common Fisheries Policy

The European Commission has recently adopted a green paper on the future of the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Fishermen and other interested parties are encouraged to take part in the consultation process between now and 31 December 2009. The consultation process is the first step towards a radical reform of the CFP.

It is vital that the CFP is reformed. We are faced with a dangerously depleted state of European fish stocks after years of over-fishing. The green paper highlights the fact that 88% of European fish stocks are over-fished against a global average of 25%. Not only does over-fishing deplete stocks, but it is economically inefficient as it constantly drives down the industry's profits.

I wholeheartedly support reform of the CFP and it is vital that any new developments do not treat Scottish fishermen unfairly.

New Passenger Rights for EU Citizens

The European Parliament recently passed a new law giving bus, coach and ferry passengers basic rights that are comparable with those that the EU has already granted to air and rail passengers.

Passengers rights are paramount and European transport policy must reflect this priority. This is the first time that bus, coach and ferry companies will be forbidden to deny boarding on the grounds of reduced mobility and assistance to board must be provided free at all terminals and ports. This new law will make a massive difference to people with disabilities and to pregnant women.

Labour MEPs always put people first and strive to give consumers a fairer deal. I am delighted that compensation will be given to passengers in the event of delay, baggage loss, as well as a right to compensation for accidents causing injury or death. In addition, if passengers are delayed for over two hours, alternative transport must be provided. If the passenger does not accept the alternative arrangements, the travel company must reimburse the customer in full.

Gr8 News for Mobile Phone Users

Labour MEPs have fought a successful campaign in the European Parliament to force mobile phone companies to slash the cost of roaming charges for calling and texting on mobile phones. This is yet another example of Labour putting consumers first and ensuring that people get a fairer deal. Labour has been fighting to bring down the cost of roaming charges since 2007, despite fierce opposition from mobile phone operators.

The price of roaming calls will drop continuously over the next three years. MEPs and the Council Presidency agreed with the European Commission that a roamed text message (SMS) should cost a maximum of €0.11 (about 10p) by July 1 2009. The cost of downloading a megabyte of information will be capped at one Euro, which is roughly 92p and will reduce to around 50 cents by 2011.

I am delighted that these new charges are being brought in time for the 2009 summer holidays!

Broadband Access in Remote Communities

At the beginning of April, I travelled to the Highlands to meet with my Labour colleague Peter Peacock MSP. Peter and I are concerned that consumers living on Scottish islands do not benefit from the same high-speed broadband communication technology that other people across the country have access to.

No European citizen should be left out of the broadband revolution. It is vital that the Highlands and Islands region of Scotland does not fall behind the provision of broadband which has been improved across Scotland in recent years. Broadband and other technologies are increasingly becoming a fundamental feature of the business landscape.

I tabled a question to the European Commission asking about what support will be provided to ensure that people living in remote and island communities are not isolated from the broadband revolution. I look forward to receiving the response.

European Elections Update

We are only weeks away from the European elections. These elections are about getting our Labour vote out to secure a strong Socialist Group in the European Parliament that will put people first, prioritise getting the economy moving again, and pursue a social policy agenda. It is crucial that we return a significant group of Labour MEPs back to Brussels in June, or we risk losing many of the social advances that we have worked for over the past couple of decades. While Labour and our partners in Europe are making real progress to tackle the credit crunch and its consequences, many Liberals and Conservatives observe vows of silence. We observe no vows of silence.

In the past couple of weeks I have been travelling the length and breadth of Scotland. If you would like an update of my campaign diary and where I will be over the next few weeks, please my office who will happily give you more details.

NB: If you have not yet seen the Party of European Socialist Manifesto or the leaflet '*Working for a Fairer Europe*' jointly prepared by David Martin and myself, please visit my website. These are available for download in the 'News and Press Releases' section.

Get in Touch!

For more information about my work in the Parliament, or if you require any additional information about the forthcoming elections, please do not hesitate to contact my office – I am happy to help!

25 Church Street,
Inverkeithing,
Fife,
KY11 1LG

t: 01383 417 799

f: 01383 413 335

cstihlermep@btconnect.com

www.cstihlermep.com

Printed by Catherine Stihler MEP, 25 Church Street, Inverkeithing, Fife, KY11 1LG. Promoted by Colin Smyth, Scottish General Secretary on behalf of Labour's European candidates in Scotland all of Scottish Labour Party, John Smith House, 145 West Regent Street, Glasgow, G2 4RE