



Catherine Stihler MEP

Autumn 2008

Member of the European Parliament for Scotland

Welcome to the latest edition of my newsletter.

If you would like to receive my e-bulletins and monthly e-newsletters please send your details to cstihlermep2@btconnect.com.

Over the parliamentary recess, part of the roof of the hemicycle collapsed in Strasbourg. If MEPs had been sitting in the chamber there would have been fatalities.

Due to the extent of the damage our double Strasbourg sessions in September are being held in Brussels. What a difference it makes! If only this could be a permanent fixture rather than a temporary measure.

This week the "One Seat" campaign and the Campaign for Parliamentary Reform issued all MEPs with hard hats as a demonstration of the absurdity of the situation. What an embarrassment for the French presidency!

We should have one seat for the European Parliament and that should be in Brussels. The European Parliament is the only parliament in the world which has no say over where it sits. It is absurd that it takes a roof to fall in before we get to work from Brussels.



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Georgia on our minds

On the 8th August after weeks of low level hostilities and provocations by separatists in South Ossetia, the Georgian government launched a military offensive on the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali.

In support of South Ossetia's claim for independence, Russia responded to Georgia's action with a massive counter attack, sending in tanks, ground troops, and bombing several locations in Georgia and the strategically important town of Gori, blocking Georgian Black Sea ports.

At the EU Summit on the 1st September the Prime Ministers and Presidents of EU Member States condemned Russia for recognising South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and agreed that they would postpone talks on a new long term partnership agreement until the Russians withdrew their troops to the pre-August position.

The Socialist Group and the EPLP condemn both the military intervention by Georgia in South Ossetia, and Russia's brutal and disproportionate reaction. There can be no military solution, only a political one and I hope a resolution is reached very soon.

www.send2women.eu

Gender inequality in the workplace is still with us, and it is unacceptable that women face a constant battle against prejudice to land top jobs.

In 2009 there will be potentially four top EU jobs to be filled: the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission, the President of the European Parliament and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

All the potential candidates named so far have one thing in common – they are all male!

In this day and age the face of the EU cannot be exclusively male. That is why www.send2women.eu is calling on all Heads of State and Government of Member States - alongside the French Presidency, to ensure that the appointment process of these roles takes into account gender balance.

Visit www.send2women.eu for further information.

Real Fears for the Social Package

The Social Package debate in the European Parliament highlights the challenges we face in trying to pursue a progressive social agenda.

Commissioner Spidla gave an overview of the eighteen initiatives included in the Social Package. The two most important initiatives are:

- The reform of the European Works Councils rules to give better protection to workers.
- The proposed anti-discrimination directive covering people's rights outwith the workplace.

Two other important issues are the reform of the Working Time Directive and the Temporary Agency Workers Directive. It currently looks as though the second reading package agreed for temporary agency workers will go through the parliament without amendment. However, the Working Time Directive will be less straightforward.

It seems that parliament will vote early next year on these packages. The EPLP will meet the UK Government and trade unions before adopting a final position.

However, the leader of the Socialist Group, Martin Schultz, correctly pointed out that the right is in control of the European Union. They have a majority in the Council of Ministers, most of the EU Commissioners, and the PPE is the biggest group in the European Parliament. He accused the right of paying only lip-service to the social agenda. In the EU the wage-gap is increasing, inequality is increasing, fuel prices soaring, and EU citizens fear that their quality of life is deteriorating.

The EU must guarantee an improvement in people's living standards, and the social package does not go far enough. Another speaker in the debate commented on the 'working poor' in the EU. It is not just about tackling unemployment but about having decent work which allows for a decent life. (Please see www.decentwork.org for information on the decent work campaign).

I will be keeping you updated about the progress of these issues as they make their way through parliament on www.cstihlermep.com.

Maternal Health

I am outraged that we are failing to cut global maternity deaths by 75% - meaning that this is the only Millennium Development Goal we are not achieving.

We need to take urgent action to stop half a million women dying needlessly each year in pregnancy or childbirth.

Worldwide a woman dies every minute giving birth and a woman in the developing world has a lifetime risk of 1 in 16 of dying in pregnancy or childbirth.

We need a targeted and properly financed EU action plan in order to ensure that in the future, no expecting woman or new mum dies needlessly.

I have addressed the European Commission and the French Presidency asking them to make this a key priority over the next few weeks, as we move to the UN meeting in New York, at the end of September.

It is shambolic that we are failing the most vulnerable women and children in the world.

For further information on the Millennium Development Goals can be found at www.un.org.

I will be keeping you updated about the progress of this use at www.cstihlermep.com.



Economic Partnership Agreements

I have been closely following the negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The needs expressed by African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries must be met not only by increasing their participation and integration in international trade, but also in the promotion, regional integration, and achievement of the millennium development goals.

The benefit of EPAs to ACP countries are not always clear, and we need a flexible approach to take into account the different needs and levels of development of the ACP countries and regions.

I am particularly concerned about:

- The implications of splintering ACP regions and the damage to regional integration.
- Continued lack of clarity as to whether poor countries will have longer to adjust than richer ones.
- Damage to the relationship Europe has with the ACP.

You can rest assured that we will continue to work for development-friendly EPAs and that we are

encouraged by the Council's strong language in favour of flexibility and pragmatism – language that we believe should be heeded by the Commission.

The EPLP will continue to work for increased flexibility concerning the negotiations towards regional EPAs and will urge the Commission to adopt a more accommodating, consensual approach. Our central strategy must be to support the Council position agreed in May and work towards the fulfilment of the development objectives of EPAs.

We now need a clear agenda for continuing negotiations and this should be accepted and agreed by both parties. Contentious issues must not be left until the end and there must be a more participatory approach, more transparency, agreed timescales and respect for ACP regional and national interests.

These trade agreements are absolutely critical for the future of some of the world's poorest countries, and first and foremost they should be perceived as tools for development.

Euro Sceptics Take the Biscuit

You may have read recently that the Scottish Women's Rural Institute banned the consumption of cakes and scones entered in competitions, due to European regulations.

This is in fact another Euromyth and operations such as the occasional handling, preparation, storage and serving of food by private persons at events such as church, school or village fairs are not covered by the scope of the regulations.

Here is a copy of my letter to the press on the subject:

Take a dollop of inaccuracy, a pinch of paranoia, fold in a euro sceptic, turn up the heat and leave it to simmer – hey presto, you have cooked up yet another Euro myth.

The recently reported EU law on food hygiene does NOT apply to cakes prepared for SWRI events or local fairs.

We now need to ask why the SWRI has been given such misleading information and why sections of the press and the Tories are creating false EU myth stories. Could it be that they prefer a scare story to the truth?

These whipped up stories really are taking the biscuit.



Be involved...

Out & About

European Fundraiser:

I would like to thank everyone who contributed, especially Helen and Bob Eadie and family, who hosted the event.

I will continue to organise more fundraisers in the run up to the elections in June 2009.

Updates on fundraising events will be available on my website www.cstihlermep.com.



Catherine is always happy to speak at meetings, attend primary and secondary schools to talk about her work as a MEP, as well as visit local businesses and support Scottish projects. Some of Catherine's recent engagements across Scotland have included:

- * A visit to Cairneyhill Primary School in Dunfermline to speak to pupils about the European Parliament.
- * A visit to T-Mobile's contact centre in Greenock with Duncan MacNeil MSP.



Dates for your diary:

European Forum

22nd November 2008 – Inverness – Merkinch Community Centre (tbc) @ 10am – 12noon.

Fundraising

3rd November 2008 (tbc) – Helen Eadie's Curry Night – please contact Ellie on 01383 412 856 for further information.

Updates on relevant events and those hosted or attended by Catherine are available at www.cstihlermep.com. To bring an event to Catherine's attention please contact Yvonne on 01383 417 799.

Or email cstihlermep@btconnect.com

Constituency Trip

This year's constituency trip departs from Edinburgh and Glasgow on Tuesday 7th October and will take in the sights of Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp, Leuven and Amsterdam.

The trip is now full. However, we are welcoming people to express an interest in next year's trip to Strasbourg.

To register your interest in next year's trip please contact Kirsty on

01383 417 799

Or email

cstihlermep2@btconnect.com.

Keep in touch

Catherine's constituency office is staffed by her administrator Yvonne Thorpe (Monday – Friday, 9am – 3pm), and by her Press and Campaigns Officer, Kirsty Leiper.

For more information or to invite Catherine to events, please contact us at the address below:

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