

Catherine Stihler MEP

Member of the European Parliament for Scotland

September 2008 e-newsletter

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- Dates for your diary

Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of my e-newsletter. Please feel free to forward this to friends, family and colleagues. Should you wish to stop receiving email updates please reply directly to this email with "unsubscribe" in the subject header.

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Relief from the ferry fiasco

The news that Forth Ports has found a replacement ferry operator for the Rosyth – Zeebrugge route is a long awaited relief.

The ferry route is a vital link between Scotland and mainland Europe and when Superfast stopped running on Saturday 13th September, I was convinced that the Scottish Government had failed to do all that it could to maintain this vital connection without a break in service.

Thanks to the perseverance of Forth Ports a suitable operator has now been found. Unfortunately I feel the new operator will have to work twice as hard to attract freight back to the route because of the interruption in service.

Co-operating closely with the other Scottish MEPs, as a group we have been more than supportive of all European funding bids, and will ensure that the new operator is aware of the opportunities that are available – and that our support for a Scottish service is absolute.

I am convinced that the Scottish Government could have more effectively sought a replacement operator. I still question why our First Minister failed to speak out and step up to the mark on this issue – and chose a cloak of invisibility instead. Why has he failed to stand up for the Scottish economy, and why did he rarely pledge his support publicly for a replacement operator? Was it perhaps a case of disassociating himself from a negative Scottish issue?

I am currently organising a meeting with Forth Ports to congratulate them on their efforts and to discuss the continuation of the freight operation in further detail. I aim to meet with the new ferry operators in the near future.

The fight for one seat continues

For a long time there have been complaints about the European Parliament building in Strasbourg and no wonder! A building that is used only 48 days a year is bound to have difficulty adjusting to the occasional intensive level of occupancy expected of it. Although there have been many jokes about certain MEPs hacking away at the roof of the hemicycle, the seriousness of almost ten per cent of the chamber roof falling in during the summer recess cannot be ignored. If MEPs had been sitting in the vicinity of the collapse there would certainly have been fatalities.

Now there are fears that the bridge between the old and new buildings in Strasbourg is unsafe and that other parts of the building require inspection. The Parliament authorities must be able to reassure MEPs, and all staff about the safety of the building.

The Campaign for Parliamentary reform recently welcomed MEPs to Brussels with hard hats - an important safety precaution should we have to return to Strasbourg. I urge MEPs to sign the forthcoming written declaration sponsored by Alexander Alvaro (ALDE), Piia-Noora Kauppi (EPP-ED), Frédérique Ries (ALDE), Helga Trüpel (Greens), and myself (PSE) to hold all European Parliament plenary sessions in Brussels. Now there is a message to send to electors, Council and the Commission for the 2009 European elections!

Rumour has it that the steel used in the European Parliament buildings in Strasbourg is the same as that used in the new terminal at Charles de Gaulle Airport where the roof also collapsed. Despite this and other doubts, for instance, relating to the presence of asbestos in the building, we have been told that the October session will be held in Strasbourg.

The European Parliament legislates on health and safety across the EU but as MEPs we have not got the power to refuse to return to a 'sick building'. The French government is apparently putting the parliament services under immense pressure to get us back into a building which places our health at

risk. However, whilst the health and safety issues are important, the overwhelming argument to have a single seat relates to having a more effective parliament clearly located in Brussels, saving the immense waste of money, time and resources bound up in the monthly commute to Strasbourg.

Yesterday the European Parliament itself narrowly voted by 20 votes not to recognise the petition with over one million signatures from European citizens calling for one seat. Many MEPs failed to understand what they were voting for until it was too late. There was also confusion during the proceedings when a free vote was given with little broader discussion of the implications of rejecting the first EU-wide citizens' initiative.

Yet many ambitious MEPs are choosing not to make a stance. Unfortunately there are some vested interests in keeping Strasbourg. One MEP colleague told me it was 'impossible' for him to sign the Campaign for Parliamentary Reform's written declaration on having one seat. I replied that they used to say it was impossible to put a man on the moon but it has been done. He replied that we must give the French something in return for quitting Strasbourg. Why not? But the Strasbourg sessions must stop and in the meantime let's hope that there are no fatalities if the roof falls in again.

Dates for Your Diary:

European Forum:

After a very successful European Forum in Edinburgh, with Paul Sweeney, Economic Advisor with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Catherine and David would like to invite you to attend the next forum taking place in Inverness.

Saturday 22nd – Merkinch Community Centre, Inverness – 10am – 12noon. *Guest speaker tbc.*

European Elections:

The European elections are taking place in June 2009, and should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact my office on 01383 417 799.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact me at:

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