



Alyn Smith MEP 



## CAP REFORM MOVES CLOSER

Alyn welcomed a vote in the Agriculture Committee on Commission proposals to reform the Common Agricultural Policy. The "Goepel Report", drafted by German Christian Democrat Lutz Goepel, was subject to a mammoth 700 amendments, but in the final vote was approved by 33 votes to 6 with 3 abstentions. The report will go on to the plenary in Strasbourg in March and then become the formal view of the Parliament on the reform proposals.

Speaking after the vote, Alyn said: "After three hours of voting we will take a wee while to analyse the final results, but I think we did a decent bit of work today.

"The Common Agricultural Policy is one of the most controversial parts of the EU's work, and it is right that we keep it under review, but what Scotland's farmers and growers need most is stability. The Commission proposals in the CAP Healthcheck manage that balance; they tidy up the parts which are not working well but keep the door closed against wholesale reform, which is already programmed for a few years time.

"For my part, the amendments I put down were in the main either successful or incorporated into successful compromise amendments, so I'm happy that the report both passes the Hippocratic test of doing no harm, and also has a couple of solid steps forward for Scotland's agriculture.

"I was particularly pleased to see:

- a call for an EU livestock plan which will be tailored to mountainous, island and less-favoured areas;
- confirmation that set-aside is now finished and done with, and that the spin-off environmental benefits should be promoted under other budgets; and crucially
- proposals to simplify EU administration.

"The report has not made it out of the Parliament yet so it is possible, albeit unlikely, that it will be amended by full plenary next month, but today the Agriculture Committee has made a solid contribution to sensible incremental reform of the CAP and I'm glad to see it move forward."



## MEP MISSION TO KOSOVA

Alyn was in Kosovo earlier in the month on a three day fact-finding and observation mission where he met with the European Commission and United Nations missions in Pristina, as well as Kosovan politicians from across the political spectrum, the two Deputy Prime Ministers and Kosovan civil society.

Alyn's European Commission organised visit came the day after the final vote in the Serbian Presidential election and during the final preparations for Kosovo's Declaration of Independence.

Speaking from Edinburgh, Alyn said: "Kosova has a wretched recent history, and you do not need to go far in Pristina to see the evidence of conflict, I was humbled just to be there and comprehend the scale of Kosovo's problems. I counted nine tanks on the road just in from the airport.

"But the buzz around the place was inspiring. Independence is on everyone's lips, and is accepted by all international observers that it is the only way forward to build a nation. I met politicians from all points of the political and ethnic spectrum, and certainly all those I spoke to were conscious that the right to self determination goes hand-in-hand with the obligation to ensure civil rights for the minority populations and equality before the law for all.

"Meeting politicians from the Kosovan Serb community was particularly helpful. There is an acceptance that independence will happen and that so long as their rights are secure they will work with the government. Under the constitution presently being discussed in the Kosovan parliament all rights are guaranteed, but legal rights on paper are worthless without observance and enforcement of them.

"Meeting the international community was instructive. The UN, and now the EU has been instrumental in promoting Kosovan independence, and it is likely that the UK will be amongst the first states to recognise Kosovo as independent. EU funds also will be instrumental in keeping the Kosovan civil police and judiciary running while the Kosovans themselves train sufficient personnel to take over.

"Kosova was badly let down by the international community in 1999, and the EU response was woeful. However, those lessons appear to have been learned, and there is a real commitment on the part of the EU to make Kosovo a success. The credibility of the EU is on the line, but that is as nothing compared to the nervousness and apprehension felt by many Kosovans and those doubts must be assuaged if Kosovo is to have any chance to flourish."

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## ALYN CALLS FOR EU FUNDING FOR THE HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS TO CONTINUE POST-2013

### EURO NEWS MONTHLY FEBRUARY 2008

Alyn has called for the continuation of EU funding support for the Highlands and Islands after 2013. EU funding under the current 2007-2013 programming period is due to end in 2013.

Discussions are currently underway in Brussels on the future shape of Europe's structural funds post-2013, looking at how they could be adapted to enable regions to address various new challenges they are likely to face from issues such as depopulation, climate change and energy supply, and how the funds can be used more effectively to improve the delivery of economic and social cohesion across Europe's regions.

It is likely that Scotland's share will be cut again as EU funding continues to move eastwards to Europe's new member states. Under the 2007-2013 programming period, Scotland's EU funding was cut by over 50% from £1.1 billion to £540.2 million, with the Highlands and Islands share reduced to £117 million.

Speaking from Strasbourg Alyn said: "It is essential that we do not take our eye off the structural fund ball here in Scotland and start looking at the new funding programme period after 2013 to ensure EU funds continue to cover Scotland. While not disputing the economic development needs of the newer EU Member States, and it is right that the bulk of economic development support goes to the post-2004 member states, nonetheless it remains the case that the Highlands and Islands is also likely to need further support from the structural funds after 2013.



Alyn, pictured above, speaking to 'The Record – Europe' about the plight of Scotland's farmers.

### EU SUPERMARKETS IN THE DOCK - MEPS DEMAND ACTION

The European Parliament has started the process towards calling the supermarkets of the EU to account over their actions. It has passed a Written Declaration calling for a full Commission investigation with a view to regulation of the pricing policies of supermarkets and their effect upon the supply chain.

Alyn, as Scotland's only full member of the Parliament's Agriculture Committee was one of the early signatories to the Declaration. He said: "This is good news for Scotland's farmers, coming as it does after the announcement that the UK authorities too are to act and not before time.

"The actions of the supermarkets have been causing concern for long enough, and the position that supermarkets play in the supply chain is not a healthy one. The UK is particularly afflicted by the position of the big four supermarkets but this is an EU-wide problem and the Commission will now be obliged to act by our move today.

"Several issues to do with supermarkets have crossed my desk, from their actions in making producers pay for marketing campaigns to flat refusal to stock local produce. It was these concerns that spurred me into so vociferously supporting Scotland's farmers' markets and food co-operatives as I want to see these built up as an alternative to the supermarkets and as a real alternative to the food served up to many of our most vulnerable citizens.

"Today shows that the European Parliament is sensitive to these issues, and we want to see action from the member state governments and from the Commission. After today's passing of the Declaration they are now obliged to do so."

"The Highlands and Islands have benefited and continue to benefit from EU funding through a variety of valuable projects. While these have helped to boost economic growth as well as education and training infrastructure, the economic challenges that continue to confront the Highlands and Islands are such that I believe they still require continued support from the EU structural funds.

"I will be calling on the Commission to ensure that the economic development problems in all Europe's regions, and not only those in the newer Member States, are recognised as they move towards budgetary and structural fund proposals for the post-2013 period. However, this debate in Brussels must be joined with discussions back in Scotland to ensure the Highlands and Islands does not miss out".

### ALYN LAUNCHES BLOG!

As well as the website [www.alynsmith.eu](http://www.alynsmith.eu), Alyn has made one giant step into cyberspace to launch the "Scotland IS Europe" blog at [alynsmith.blogspot.com](http://alynsmith.blogspot.com) for the inside track on what is happening in EU, international and Scottish politics. Comments welcome!