



Alyn Smith MEP 



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YOUNG HACKS EXPLORE BRUSSELS



Alyn is pictured above with Journalism students and several local newspaper Journalists in the European Parliament building in Brussels.

Earlier this month Alyn was joined in Brussels by a group of Scotland's top Journalism students for a training day at the European Parliament. The day included a tour of the European Parliament, along with seminars which covered topics such as: Scotland Europa; presentations by journalists who work in the EU; inroads into EU funding; COSLA; the International Press Association; and the European Parliament and European Commission Press Team. The day was rounded off with a question and answer session with Ambassador Geraldine Byrne-Nason from Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU. Her discussion covered lessons Scotland can learn from Ireland's experience inside the EU.

Speaking after the training day, Alyn said: "Europe is understandably seen as a bit of a maze but there are plenty of people who are approachable and knowledgeable who can provide contacts and details for journalists, but at the same time journalists need assistance in finding the right door to start with.

EU SCHOOL FRUIT BOOST WELCOMED

Alyn has welcomed a vote which will see each European schoolchild receive a piece of fruit each day, funded by EU cash. The initiative will see an initial 90 million euro allocated to a scheme which will see member states able to access budgets to provide primary school children with one piece of fruit a day.

He said: "This is great news for producers, governments and schoolchildren alike! This will allow the Scottish Government to access new EU cash to create a new market for local Scottish produce, and will help with the long-term health of the nation. This is a good piece of work by the Parliament today, and I look forward to seeing it launch in schools in Scotland."

"The aim of the day was to bring a greater degree of understanding of the way the EU works, as well as, more specifically, encouraging journalists to think about the European angle to their stories. There is often such an angle, but infrequently it finds its way into the story.

"I hope - and feel optimistic that we were successful - that the training day was valuable in making this first step a little less daunting."

COMPLAINT OVER HBOS TO EU COMMISSION

Alyn has written to the EU Competition Commissioner querying the actions of the UK Government for failing to offer a level playing field to alternative bidders for HBOS or to the bank remaining independent in the operation of the UK Banking Recapitalisation Package. The complaint comes after UK Chancellor Alistair Darling admitted that no other bidder "would have automatic right of access to the recapitalisation scheme" thereby confirming that the favoured option of the UK Government is a takeover of HBOS by Lloyds TSB, to the detriment of all other options including HBOS remaining an independent bank.

Alyn said: "The UK Government has clearly set its face against any other option than the Lloyds TSB merger with HBOS. The recapitalisation scheme is offering essential support to our banking sector but it must be available across the board, on the same terms to all. There are plenty of concerns over this deal and the tactics being used by the UK Government to see it goes ahead but I believe the most significant is the specific operation of the recapitalisation available to the merged bank clearly favouring one outcome for HBOS while other banks are allowed to maintain their independence.

"Lloyds TSB has rightly pursued their commercial objectives throughout with the support of their shareholders however I find it sorely disappointing that the Chancellor appears more interested in seeing this deal through for political expediency than fighting to maintain the central place of HBOS and its employees in Scotland and Edinburgh's economy.

"The European Commission is the ultimate arbiter of fair play, and I believe the time is right to involve the Competition Commissioner as every UK check and balance has been comprehensively overruled. The Commission has approved recapitalisation in the UK and across the EU but has forced changes in its operation in other countries where it has not been made available to all on the same terms. I hope it will force Chancellor Darling to make the recapitalisation funds available to all potentially interested parties, including an independent HBOS under new management."



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Alyn, above, with Jill Evans MEP. The pair have written to the Presidents of the Scottish and Welsh Football Associations in advance of talks between those bodies to thrash out the details of a prospective joint bid to hold football's European Championships in 2016.

SMITH HAILS "BENDY BANANA BOMBHELL"

Alyn has hailed a decision by member state governments to relax EU definitions on fruit and vegetables as a victory for common sense. The infamous "straight banana" of legend sprang from common standards agreed years ago to standardise EU trade in fruit and vegetables, but have proven unnecessary and the decision today comes after intense lobbying from the European Commission to scrap the rules.

The decision will relax standards, and allow more irregularly shaped fruit and vegetables to be sold to the consumer where presently irregular shaped fruit and veg will more usually be used in processed food.

Alyn said: "I'm tempted towards whimsy on welcoming this decision, but this is good news for producers and consumers. It may just perhaps even nail once and for all the myth that the EU regulates everything in sight. The rules have actually helped EU trade in fruit and veg because they replaced 27 sets of standards on banana curvature or cucumber circumference, with one set of rules, across a massive market.

"However the rules have proven too proscriptive, and Commission proposals to sweep them away and keep only a bare minimum in certain products is sensible and welcome. I'm not convinced by retailers promising savings of 40% because in my experience the EU rules are far, far more flexible than the rules the supermarkets enforce on their producers, but anything that declutters the EU legislative playing field has to be good news.

"I also flatly disagree with supermarkets promising that this move will stop a fifth of produce going to waste. There is no way supermarkets would allow this sort of wastage in the first place, some irregular produce may not be sold direct to the consumer, but it will assuredly find its way into a pie or some other processed food, not the bin.

"But all in all, at a time of food price inflation it seems only logical to ensure that as much food produced can reach the consumer, so a thumbs up to the European Commission from me. I hope eurosceptics everywhere, deprived of their sport, will now discover a new, more rewarding hobby: keeping a close eye on bananas across the EU to see if they become any more noticeably bendy."

STOP PRESS!

After Glasgow East and Glenrothes, the Party will once again attempt to complete the selection processes for the European elections in June 2009 so Alyn's newsletters will take a wee break. However, you can keep up with Alyn on www.alynsmith.eu.

SCOTS AND IRISH MEPS MEET AMID OLD FIRM 'FAMINE SONG' FURORE

Alyn has agreed that his Irish counterpart, Fianna Fáil MEP Eoin Ryan, will come to Scotland at Alyn's invitation to see first hand efforts underway to combat sectarianism in football. Alyn, himself a Glaswegian raised in Larkhall, intervened after Mr Ryan raised on the floor of the European Parliament in Strasbourg the conduct of Rangers fans during the club's most recent game.

Alyn has arranged meetings in principle with anti-sectarian organisations, the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council and the Old Firm football clubs.

He said: "Eoin's criticism last night of sectarianism in the Old Firm was well aimed, and hit home, and it seems right that given we work together in Europe on so many issues we should work together on this also. A lot of good work has been done in Scotland to combat sectarianism, on all sides, and I am not going to stand by and watch a limited few mindless thugs damage our special relationship with the Irish.

"I know Eoin agrees that sectarianism on all sides is equally offensive, and I hope he will see Scotland to meet with all sides and reassure himself and his constituents that the Government of Scotland, and all points of the political spectrum, are committed to ridding us of this tiddly toy town poison in our national game. It was Rabbin Burns who said that we should "see ourselves as others see us" and I hope those responsible on both sides of the Old Firm will think on.

"Organisations like Nil By Mouth have been doing some fantastic work in building bridges, and I hope that by introducing them to Eoin we can put right some of the damage that has been done to Scotland's reputation in the eyes of some of our closest friends."

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