



Welcome to my latest newsletter which covers the latest developments in the European Parliament.

If you require any further information on any of the issues covered in this edition then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

New Own Initiative Report

Following on from my recent report focusing on bringing EU funds closer together, I am pleased to have been selected to write another report on the important topic of Structural Funding. This new report will look at how preparations are advancing in EU Member States in the lead up to the next round of Structural Funds, due to get underway in 2014. As I prepare to draft my report I will be meeting with the European Commission and representatives from various Member States and regions to draw on examples of those who are leading the way in the preparations. It is vitally important to make the most out of the next round of structural funds, with the money aimed at projects that can deliver clear added value to EU citizens. £1.9bn of structural funding has been injected into Wales since 2007. This money has given our economy a vital boost by creating new jobs, investing in research and innovation and boosting environmental schemes. Wales is often praised for the way in which it administers European funding and planning and preparations for the next round of funding are fully underway. However, in some EU Member States the situation isn't as advanced and these Member States might not be ready for the start of the new programming period. This report brings my total number of reports and opinions since 2009 up to 13.

Social investment

Last week, Labour MEPs voted in favour of a resolution to promote social investment for growth and cohesion. The report is a reaction to the "Social Investment Package" presented by the Commission earlier this year. A major priority in this resolution is to push for the "frontloading" of €6 billion for the Youth Unemployment Initiative. With youth unemployment currently at such a high level, we need to make sure that EU funds for this purpose are readily available and I believe this should be one of the main priorities in the next programming period. The Socialists and Democrats group, which Labour MEPs belong to, highlighted that a minimum amount of 25% from the cohesion policy budget should be used for the European Social Fund, a fund which has had a massive impact on the lives of people in Wales - since 2007 48,200 people have been helped into work, and 130,500 people have gained qualifications as a result of the ESF. We need to make sure that these valuable projects continue in Wales, and continued ESF funding will help us to get even more people back into work, training and education. Social investment will help to boost jobs and growth, and will help tackle problems relating to poverty in our society.

Fund for aid to the most deprived

The number of people using food banks in Wales had doubled in the last year, according to the Trussel Trust, one of the main providers of food banks. More than 35,000 people across Wales are using food banks and around 4.7 million people across the UK are currently living in fuel poverty. Rising living costs, stagnant wages and unemployment are some of the factors which have contributed to the significant rise over the last 12 months. Labour MEPs therefore gave their full backing to a new EU fund for "Aid to the most deprived", which could help to alleviate some funding problems that food banks, NGOs and charities have at the moment. The new fund would not only be food, but for homelessness and material deprivation. The European Parliament has called for €3.5 billion, the position I set out as draftsman for the Budget committee opinion, to be allocated to this Fund. However, the Tory led UK Government oppose the plans and have said that if they have the choice, they will not use this money. Once again, the Tories



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are showing their true colours by letting down the most poor and vulnerable in our society. Negotiations are ongoing about the way the fund will work, but I very much hope that the UK government will reconsider their stance in order to help those people going without food across Wales.

Update on EU Budget negotiations (2014-2020)

Negotiations for the EU's next seven year budget are in their final stages. High level talks between the Council, Parliament and Commission have been taking place in recent weeks in order to hammer out a final deal. Although there is no disagreement on the overall figures, the European Parliament are pushing for more flexibility for the multiannual financial framework and annual budgets and a mid term review of the budget, in order to make changes at a later stage, if economic circumstances improve. There are some sticking points between the Council and European Parliament, which largely concerns the unpaid bills for the 2012/2013 budget, which total €11.2bn. I believe it is in Wales' interests to get a deal as soon as possible so that Structural Funds programmes and CAP funding can start without delay in 2014 and I will continue to work hard to ensure that Wales gets at least the same amount of funding as it currently receives. If an agreement is reached between the two sides, we could see a vote in the European Parliament as soon as July.

New transparency rules for the extractive industries

Labour MEPs have led on key legislation to make sure that "extractive industries" (e.g. oil, gas, logging) will have to adhere to new transparency rules - European companies will now have to disclose payments above €100,000 made to governments for access to natural resources. Any payments above this level will have to be published, which will mean that citizens will now be able to call on governments to make sure revenues are being spent for the best purposes and to the benefit of citizens, particularly those in developing countries. The legislation covers all countries, but it is clear that developing countries such as Africa, will benefit greatly from this agreement. Not only will citizens be better placed to know what their government is receiving, increased transparency will also make sure that these countries get a better deal for their resources, and that they are not being exploited by big companies. Labour MEPs fully support this legislation, which strives to get a better deal for people living in resource rich countries, but who still live in abject poverty by making sure money is spent where it should be.

Reform of asylum laws

Last week I voted in favour of changes to the regulations that govern the treatment of asylum seekers in the EU, which will ensure that a fairer and more harmonised system is put in place to protect asylum seekers in EU member states. Under current EU law it is not required to make a decision regarding an asylum seeker's application within a specific timeframe, leaving applicants vulnerable to long-term insecurity. This new package will impose a new six-month deadline for handling applications, which will not only help put a stop to this uncertainty, but also resolve disparities between different frameworks across the member states. Furthermore, these new regulations mean that asylum seekers cannot be transferred to EU countries where they may be at risk of being treated in a degrading manner. Reform of EU asylum rules is essential and this legislative package will lead to a fairer and better system, with a sharper focus on the human rights of asylum seekers.

Chwarae Teg

This month I also took part in a discussion on women's roles in the Welsh workforce. Chwarae Teg, a charity that supports women in the Welsh economy, was in Brussels to present the findings of its new research into the issues women in Wales are currently facing in the workplace. The result was a fascinating debate on how women in Wales can overcome the barriers and stereotypes endemic to so many working environments and ultimately achieve gender equality. Chwarae Teg's work is supported by the European Social Fund, and this event was a great opportunity to showcase the fantastic work they do to help women break the glass ceiling.

Euro 2014 Campaign latest

With the recent confirmation that voting in the next European Parliamentary elections will take place on 22-25 May 2014, there is now less than a year until voters in Wales go to the polls to choose their MEPs.

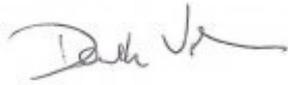
It promises to be an interesting campaign where we will have to work hard as a party to motivate and support our activists and ensure that our voters turn out to deliver a stronger voice for Wales returning more Welsh Labour MEPs than is currently the case. The election will also provide an ideal opportunity to demolish the myths that surround UKIP, put a positive case for continued membership of the EU and send a clear message to the coalition government that their rightwing austerity policies have no place here in Wales.

Over the next few months, you will see a step up in our campaigning levels and I will be providing a range of campaign resources for use by CLPs and others including:

- Policy briefings on subjects such as immigration, EU funding and other topical issues
- Sample articles for use in newsletters and leaflets
- Templates of specialised European Election campaign literature

I will also be working closely with MPs, AMs, Labour Groups in local government, CLPs, trade unions and party members across Wales to get the Welsh Labour message out on to the doorstep. If you would like to volunteer to play an active role in the campaign then please send your contact details and availability in an email to derekvaughanmep@gmail.com.

Best Wishes



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Member of the European Parliament

Labour, Wales

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