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Welcome to the latest edition of my monthly enewsletter.

MEPs were in Strasbourg again last week discussing a wide range of issues. These included measures to combat organised crime, the promotion of equality between men and women throughout the EU, addressing the importance of diabetes in the EU, and working towards the eradication of child labour worldwide.

Equality measures

On the 8th of March the world celebrated International Woman's Day. Equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of the EU and I believe the EU should take tough initiatives to tackle inequality. This is why I voted in favour of a report that calls on the Commission to propose legislation to reduce the gender pay gap and quotas to boost female representation on corporate boards and in political bodies, especially when national measures to ensure equality are inadequate. An EU equal pay target to reduce the gender pay gap by 10% in each EU country is a great initiative and shows that we at the European Parliament are committed to the important issue of equality.

Child labour in cocoa sector

I supported an important report aiming to enable the eradication of child labour in the cocoa industry. Chocolate may taste great but we need to remember that the production of chocolate is very labour-intensive and can include exposure to pesticides. Studies have suggested that children have been trafficked to work in this sector, which I find very concerning. This report is a starting point for further action and will encourage everyone in the chain of production - from growers to governments- to play their part in combating forced child labour.

Tackling international crime

Special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering This week, MEP's voted in favour of the creation of a special parliamentary committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The committee will evaluate the extent of impact of organised crime on the EU economy and society and will play a key role in developing measures to enable the EU to respond to these threats at international, European and national levels. I supported the creation of this special committee because I believe international criminal organisations are a huge threat to all EU countries. An EU



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response to this issue reflects the European Union's persistence in not backing down to organised crime.

Addressing the EU diabetes epidemic

Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. I voted in favour of this resolution as I believe a dedicated EU strategy to tackle the growing diabetes problem is essential. EU countries should ensure adequate education on healthy eating and physical exercise in schools and I believe, along with my fellow MEPs, that early diagnosis of diabetes should be made a priority in the national programmes of all EU countries.

Enlargement

Enlargement of the EU was discussed in great detail in Strasbourg this week. Myself and other MEPs at the European Parliament have made it clear that we want Iceland to join the EU and have called for a date for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to start accession talks. MEPs also expressed their concerns at the limited progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a potential candidate to join the Union.

Vaccinations

This week I signed a Written Declaration calling for continued and increased support for vaccinations in developing nations. A Written Declaration needs the signature of 377 MEPs in order for it to become the Parliament's official position on the issue in question. Vaccines and immunisations are common place for every British child but in other parts of the world vaccine coverage is sometimes very limited and despite the progress made in recent years approximately 1.7 million children worldwide die annually from vaccine preventable diseases. I very much hope that this Written Declaration will gather enough support to put pressure on the European Commission to continue to commit to reducing the number of vaccine preventable diseases in the developing world.

Carwyn's visit to Brussels

The Welsh First Minister was in Brussels recently as part of a series of meetings to coincide with St. David's Day. Carwyn Jones met with two European Commissioners, Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for Regional Affairs and Janusz Lewandowski, the Commissioner for Financial Planning and the Budget. He also attended a lunchtime reception to promote the fantastic Welsh produce that was available to guests. At the reception, Carwyn spoke of the benefits of Wales' ongoing constructive cooperation with Europe and reiterated his firm intention to continue this engagement in order to ensure that Wales' voice is heard at EU level. In my meeting with Carwyn during his visit to Brussels, we discussed my ongoing work in the Parliament, including the current negotiations on the future of Cohesion Policy, in which I am playing an active role to ensure the best result for Wales.

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In the constituency

I have continued to be active within my constituency hosting two regional EU policy events in recent weeks. The first, in Brecon, featured Huw Irranca-Davies MP and Alun Davies AM as fellow guest speakers. The second, at Venue Cymru in Llandudno, was with Ken Skates AM. I am grateful to all those people who attended and took part in the discussions and debates and it was fantastic to see and hear a wide range of viewpoints on Wales' future in the EU.



On 9th March, I spent time in Anglesey seeing for myself at first hand the benefits of EU funding in our communities and meeting with local businesses, the local authority, Cllr John Chorlton and Albert Owen MP amongst others (picture above). There are a number of exciting projects being developed to regenerate and develop the area and I am working to give as much support as I can, from a European point of view, to help attract funding and investment into the island.

Reemploy

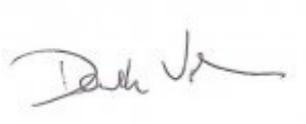
The most disappointing issue since my last enewsletter has been the announcement made by the Tory-Lib Dem UK Coalition government to decimate Remploi and close 7 out of its 9 factories in Wales. Affecting the jobs of almost 280 disabled people, they have completely failed to take into account the needs and views of its employees. I am still convinced that the Remploi model is something that should remain at the centre of future supported employment planning.

I have visited a number of Remploi plants in Wales and each factory plays an important role in their local community. Many workers would love to move into mainstream employment but in many areas this prospect is currently unrealistic. These closures will leave local people high and dry with no clear, well thought through plan to help them find alternative jobs after the plants have closed.

Over the last few years, I have been working alongside trade unions, MPs and AMs to lobby the government in opposition to these proposals. I will continue to whatever I can to fight the plans and to ensure that disabled people get the support and opportunities they deserve.

I hope this enewsletter has been useful. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you require any further information.

Best Wishes



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